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SHORT STORIES

EDITED BY C. ARTHUR PEARSON (OF PEARSON'S WEEKLY)

NO. 498. FOR WEEK ENDING JULY 16TH, 1898. [ONE PENNY.

ALL FAT PEOPLE

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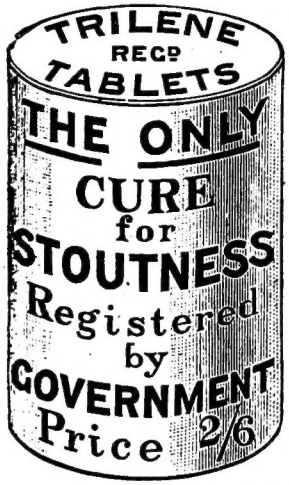

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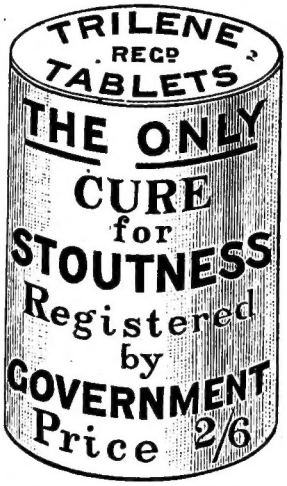

SAMPLES OF TESTIMONIALS.

"87 Alexandra Road, Norwich, October 19th, 1896.
"Gentlemen,—In reference to Trilene Tablets, I may say that my wife found the greatest possible benefit from the use of them; their action was rapid, and exceeded our utmost expectations, as they were also most beneficial to the respiratory organs. My wife was many years growing so stout, but although the disease was, I consider chronic, the Tablets soon reduced the same completely. You have our united thanks, and if I can do anything to promote your interests I will freely use my utmost endeavours to do so.
"Yours faithfully, J. R. CANHAM."

Convalescent Home, New Brighton, Cheshire.
Miss S. J. PRITCHARD says: "They have done me good. I am 21lb. lighter already."

25 Windsor Terrace, Penarth, Cardiff.
Miss M PLAVELL says: "I have lost 2st., and am much better in health."
Mrs. F. HARPER, 61 Portland Crescent, Leeds, writes: "My doctor persuaded me to try a box, and I find they have done my breathing a lot of good and I can get about much better. My doctor did not wish his name mentioned, but they have done him good personally."
Nurse CROUCHER, at Mrs. Bennett's, 14 Buckleigh Road, Streatham, says: "I lost 9lb. from the box I took."

"77 Hindhill Street, Heywood, February 5th, 1898.
"Gentlemen,—I have not quite finished the box of Tablets and am 2lib. lighter. The change is great, and several friends are beginning the treatment, which not only reduces fat but strengthens rheumatic joints—such has been the case with me.
"Yours sincerely, M. A. HEYWOOD."
Mrs. D. BURTON, of Silverleigh, Tunbridge, writes: "I am very pleased with difference in size, my friends all telling me how much thinner I am getting."

West Cornforth, Ferryhill.
Mr. WM. USHER says: "A sister of mine, who was 17st., was greatly reduced by your Tablets to 15st."
Mrs. WOODS, 447 Cowbridge Road, Canton, Cardiff, says: "Tablets have a most marked effect, and I shall take every opportunity to make known the wonders of your remedy."

FATHER T. M. BYRNE, of Holy Cross Abbey, Sligo, writes: "When I began your Tablets I was 12st. 5lb.; I now scale at 10st. 11lb.—my case, too, is hereditary."
L. LUDDRINGTON, "Sunnyside," Station Road, Sidcup, says: "I have benefited greatly, and have lost a stone."
Mr. MCLEOD, 44, Calside, Paisley, writes: "I have been cured. If you want to know my weight now, it is 10st.; reduced 1st. 8lb., and I am quite content."
A. M. PRATT, of Ongar House, Ongar, says: "My weight is so much reduced it is unnecessary to take more. The reduction of weight was from 12st. 0lb. to 10st. 4lb."
Miss A. ATKINS, 329 Southdown Road, Liverpool, writes: "I lost nearly a stone from taking one box."
Mrs. WHITEHOUSE, of Poplar Avenue, Edgbaston, writes: "My husband is in splendid health, and has lost 15lb. in weight since taking the Tablets; I am sure I thank you on his account."
Mrs. JAMES SMITH, of Cowell Terrace, Soham, says: "Your 2s. 6d. box of Tablets reduced my weight 12lb."
Col.-Sergt. WHITTLE, of East Lancashire Regt., Burnley, Lancs, says: "A man in our regiment in 1891 lost several stone from taking your Tablets."
Mr. BUTLER, Surgeon, of Hampton Manor, Evesham, says: "My patient has lost 1st. in weight whilst taking your Tablets."
"Miss HUMPHREYS, of Claremont Buildings, Shrewsbury, has lost 1st. in weight already, and thinks the Tablets deserve every success."
Mrs. O'CONNOR, 2 Kensington Square Mansions, London, writes: "I am much less stout for taking them."
Surgeon Colonel E. S. BRANDER writes from Ihansi, India, in September, 1897: "Your Tablets in my own experience form an excellent remedy for reducing weight."
The Princess LIECHTENSTEIN writes from Landsberg, Austria: "Pray send me your excellent Tablets."
Mrs. WEAVER, of Greenpits Villa, Ross, Hereford, writes: "I am reduced from 13st. 8lb. to 11st. You may use this if you like."

Balgowan Lodge, Methven, N.B.
Miss MCPHERSON writes: "I have taken a box, and am reduced 1st. in weight."

THE TRILENE ASSOCIATION, 66 FINSBURY PAVEMENT, LONDON.

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No. 498. ONE PENNY.

For the Week ending July 16th, 1898.

AUNT SOPHIE'S PORTRAIT.

"SOME people would call it superstition, said grandmother. "I said it was nonsense when I first heard of it; that people fancied the different expressions which they declared they saw on the features of the portrait. Of course, I had heard of pictures with eyes that seemed to follow you wherever you went; but this was something entirely different."

"But why was Sophie Windham's portrait never placed with those of our other ancestors? It would have been quite an attraction to the gallery to have a constantly changing portrait to show visitors."

"Sophie Windham was a beautiful woman," returned our grandmother gravely, "and her intellectual abilities were so far in advance of her time that she was regarded as a witch by many persons; and had she not died young, she would probably have had the charge of witchcraft brought against her. This portrait was

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finished after her death and was hung with the others."

"Then why did it not remain there?" I asked.

"Because almost everyone was scared by it. One declared that it glared at him as though it would like to kill him; another asserted that it smiled contemptuously; and so on. It caused such a disturbance in the household that it was taken down and placed in the lumber room, where it remained until I came here.

"When I heard the story I did not believe it, as I have said. The idea that a portrait would reflect the conscience of the person who looked at it seemed absurd to me."

"Did it do that?" we all cried in a breath.

"Yes. In the light of later experience, that is the most fitting description of the vagaries of the portrait. I had it brought down and hung up in the drawing-room. To me, the expression always seemed gentle and loving; but I couldn't keep a servant—except one—for more than a few weeks, and many of my visitors said they didn't like it. In fact, people refused our invitations and my husband finally insisted that we must put it away. And I have not seen it since."

Then I remember that they all clamoured to see the picture, and that at first grandmother would not tell them where it was. But at last she reluctantly yielded, and bade my cousin Maud go to the attic with a light and bring it back with her, because she best knew the old house.

Maud was gone a long time, until one of the other cousins got up and declared that she was going to find her. But just then the door opened suddenly and Maud stole into the room—without the picture. It was the last time I ever saw her, and I shall never forget the expression of her face. She groped her way across the room to the dark corner where she had been sitting, but as she went the firelight streamed across her pallid face and showed it drawn with horror, repulsion and fear. Her hands were trembling, and she had barely strength to reach her chair, into which she sank heavily.

All the cousins jumped up to help her, but she thrust them back impatiently, and they looked at one another in wonder, while grandmother's hands trembled on the arms of her chair. Then someone asked about the picture.

Maud sat silent, covering her face with her hands; then suddenly she cried, shuddering:

"It's horrible! Oh, grandmother, how could you say it was beautiful? Don't let them bring it down. Don't let them touch it; it is—oh! I cannot say what it is!"

Grandmother's face blanched, and she looked at Maud with an expression of fear.

"Yes, let it stay there," she said. "It is the best place for it, in the attic. I should have known better. I will never let anyone touch it again."

Our fun for the evening was spoilt, and I remember that we all crept silently away to bed, frightened and awed.

But the next morning my curiosity got the better of my nervousness of the night before, and I stole secretly to the attic to see the dreadful picture for myself. I found it in the darkest corner under the low eaves, but already someone had been before me. Whether it had been done by grandmother or by Maud herself I never knew, but the face was completely obliterated under a fresh coat of black, thick paint, and so my curiosity remained unsatisfied.

The family separated after the holidays. A few weeks after that night came the tragedy which forms the only stain on our old family name, and which destroyed all our loving associations with the old homestead. One morning Maud was found drowned in the pond near grandmother's house!

I was too young to understand then, but years later I learnt with a second shock that my cousin had not fallen into the pond by accident, as I had always supposed, but that she had drowned herself, and that it was better so.

When grandmother died, some years afterwards, her precious heirlooms were divided among us all; and to me, the youngest grandchild, was given, among other things, the choice of all I wished in the old garret. And so it happened that when I married I carried to my new home the blackened and disfigured old portrait of Sophie Windham.

I scarcely know how I came to take it, except that from childhood its story had left a deep impression upon me, and I could not bear to have the picture thrown away.

At first, remembering Maud's face that night, I was loath to have the fatal features uncovered to view in my own happy home. At last, however, I yielded to my husband's curiosity, and indeed, to my own, which had not remained idle all these years, and the picture was sent to be cleaned and to have the coating of paint removed.

When the portrait came back I hesitated long to look at the face. But John was standing by me, and, together, at last, we raised the wrappings; and, lo! we had merely a quaint and curious portrait of olden times, an ancestress of whom, indeed, I might be proud.

It was a beautiful face, smiling and very happy. The powdered hair was brushed high from the fair white forehead, and below shone the deep, liquid, searching eyes, which held and attracted one. The only fault I saw was a haughty, almost arrogant poise to the long, white neck, and an expression of self-complacent satisfaction in the curved, full lips. John, indeed, did not notice this, but fancied he read a tendency to jealousy and a little sadness in the droop of the eyebrows. Perhaps we were both right.

We placed the portrait first in the dining-room. But this made trouble. Servant after servant gave me notice without reason, until at last one confided to me that none of them could bear the horrible picture, which glared at them when they passed and caused innumerable accidents to gravy dishes and soup tureens. Evidently each read her own shortcomings—which were not always trivial—in that sweet young face.

My only relief from constant turmoil was to remove conscience from their path, and the picture was taken to the drawing-room, where they would not see so much of it. I did not wish to put it away altogether, for *I* liked it.

But here I found my ancestress even more embarrassing. The comments of my guests, who did not know how this powdered lady was betraying them, kept me in a constant state of anxiety. To one the face showed cruelty, to another deceit. One declared it to be villainously suspicious, melancholy and morbid.

I was repeating my grandmother's experience, and finally had the portrait placed in the nursery.

Here, at least, I knew that it would cause no trouble, for it could reflect only baby purity and innocence in sweet, sympathetic eyes. I hung "Aunt Sophie" (as we called her) above my Harold's cot, and left her there in peace to smile down upon him and to watch over his happy dreams.

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My baby dearly loved the pretty lady, and would often beg to be lifted up so that he might rub his little cheek to hers and kiss her smiling lips. For in her eyes he at least read nothing to fear.

We lived in a quiet suburb, where John was then superintendent of a large factory. Among the hands whom he employed he was brought into contact with some rough characters, though his tact and kindness of heart made him a general favourite and he never had trouble with any save one.

Three years after our marriage he had been obliged to discharge from the factory a certain Dick Harlow, a surly man, who had never come under John's influence and had always seemed to dislike him. He was a ruffianly fellow, an habitual drunkard, though when he first came to the factory he had been an excellent workman. His manner was at times wild and strange, for already, though we did not guess it, his drunken habits had begun to unsettle his brain, and he caused continual trouble among the other hands. Outside the district he bore a very bad reputation, and, indeed, as we afterwards learnt, he had already served time for house-breaking.

He bore a bitter grudge to John, and came to let us know it. For the morning after his discharge I saw his horrible face at our gate and heard his oaths and threats of vengeance. But he disappeared altogether from the neighbourhood after that, and we hoped it was for good, and gave up thinking about the matter.

Several months passed uneventfully, with peace restored to the factory and a feeling of security lulling our instinct, which was to be on guard. June had come, and already we were beginning to make preparations for our summer trip to the seaside.

It was a warm, beautiful night, and the moonlight flooded our east rooms. The air was oppressive and kept me awake and restless, while I heard the church clock strike the hours several times.

Little Harold slept alone in the nursery on the second floor, in the room next my own. He was a very sound sleeper and seldom stirred in the night. And yet as I lay there with my eyes closed, in the small hours of the morning, I thought I heard a slight sound in the next room. Instantly I was on the alert, raising my head to catch any indication that Harold wanted me. All was quiet for some seconds, and I began to think that I was mistaken.

Then suddenly there arose, sharp and shrill and piercing, the most horrible scream of mortal fear and anguish which I have ever heard. Then came a heavy fall, followed by silence, and after that a second scream, in which I recognised Harold's frightened voice.

My heart sank with a dreadful sickening throb of fear, and I rushed wildly to my baby's room, not daring to think what I expected to find there. John also had jumped up as if shot when the cry came, and followed me with his hand grasping the little pistol which he always kept under his pillow.

I ran instantly to the cot. Harold was sitting up in a flood of moonlight, sobbing with fright, his eyes big and wild, looking fearfully into the darkness over the foot of the cot.

"Are you hurt, darling? What is it?" I cried, as I clasped and kissed him passionately, finding him apparently only frightened.

He pointed with his chubby finger past my shoulder into the room.

"The man!" he sobbed, clinging closer to me in terror. "Man wiv big eyes."

Then I heard an exclamation from John and the click of the trigger as he cocked his pistol quickly. Turning with the sudden rush of new fear, I saw him bending over something lying in the middle of the room where Harold's eyes were staring.

Then I noticed the writhing body of a man at John's feet, and a streak of moonlight fell across the distorted face with its set teeth and pain-drawn features. But it was the eyes that thrilled and terrified me. For glaring and protruding with mortal fear they were fixed upon something above my baby's bed.

I followed their direction and gazed into the calm and tranquil face of "Aunt Sophie," which stood forth vividly in the moonlight. I turned to the man again, and clasped my boy tighter as I recognised the brutal features of Dick Harlow.

"Get up!" cried John hoarsely, with horror and loathing in his voice, covering the wretch with his pistol. But except for the convulsive twitching of his limbs the man lay motionless, his eyes still fixed in their look of horror on the picture.

"He is in a fit," said John. "Call the servants, Grace, and send for the police. I will see that he does no harm."

He stooped to the floor beside the fallen figure, but recoiled with an exclamation and turned quickly as if to keep me from seeing. But I had noticed the long knife clenched in the powerless hand, and also something more on the floor beside him.

Wrenching the knife away John stooped and picked up the huge handkerchief which I had seen. It smelt strong and pungent, and from the folds fell a sponge saturated still stronger with chloroform.

John turned to me with a sob.

"Take the baby away," he said, "and thank Heaven that he is safe and sound!"

"Thank Heaven and Aunt Sophie!"

Harlow lay there helpless in his fit until the police came and took him into custody, his eyes fixed to the last upon the face which reflected we shall never know what horrid vision to that guilty soul.

For he never spoke again. The shock of that night's fear was too much for his enfeebled strength, and his mind already unsettled by drink and passion. He was taken to the lunatic asylum, dumb and hopelessly crazed for the short remaining span of his evil life. And the look of fear, they say, remained in his haunted eyes to the end.

We never knew Harlow's full purpose in entering the house that night, except that he evidently came for revenge. But whether with a half intelligent cunning he had meant to chloroform and then kidnap the child, or whether in a fit of insane revenge he had contemplated murder itself, we have never dared to think.

The secret of that portrait may never be explained to us, but it shall always hang in that room while our child sleeps there, and when, in course of time, he leaves us to fight the battle of life for himself, he shall hang it in his own house.

Elizabeth Guthrie.

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ON THE BRINK.

It was too late when they met, for she had been married to Jack Alton for a month—a month that had been an awakening for her, in which she saw the man she had wed, slowly emerging from the dream-like mist of the days of courtship into the clear, cruel light of truth. Already she had begun to despise him and to look drearily into the coming years as a galley slave might look forward to the deadening years at the oar.

Henri Vibois knew the truth about Jack Alton. Vibois was not a sentimentalist nor much given to consideration of the happiness of anyone, but when he saw Hulda Alton he pitied her.

Every man has respect for purity, hard and careless though he may be, and Hulda Alton combined purity with a strength and gentleness that made her a noble woman. She was of the world, to be sure, and took her part in its frivolities and make believes, and when she found Jack Alton to be what he was, she simply made the best of a bad matter, and hid the scar under the robe of womanly dignity and self-restraint.

Henry Vibois, the prospering and courted artist, had drifted through a score of flirtations before he met Hulda Alton, and nothing had changed him. Women! He cared for none of them.

He admired Hulda Alton. She was so strong, so womanly. She was a revelation. He once went so far as to say that he might be induced to marry, if two such women existed. She was the ideal of his thoughtful moments.

Vibois saw her often, and each time he wondered at her self-control. This was, indeed, the one perfect woman. He knew Jack Alton and he knew the horror that a woman so noble must feel toward such a man. He admired her faithfulness. Hulda Alton remained the strong, pure woman she had ever been. And it was this strength and purity that drew them together.

Hater of women and scoffer at men, Henri Vibois found his admiration for Jack Alton's wife growing rapidly. He spent much time in her company, pleading to his conscience that he drew strength and inspiration from her. But it was impossible for Hulda not to see. She saw, but gave no sign, and Vibois would not have risked the idol he worshipped by proposing aught that might shatter it.

They were friends. And thus the year passed.

It was at a private view where Vibois had a couple of small landscapes that he first saw sorrow darken her eyes.

She was standing before a panel by Herter when he pushed his way up to her.

"Ah!" she said; "I thought you would be here. That was why I came. I am alone—and you?"

He nodded "Yes."

"Then let us go out. I want to say something to you. There is a cab at the door. I came in a cab to-night—for—reasons."

Vibois handed her into the cab.

"Where, sir?" asked the driver.

"Where?" Vibois asked Hulda.

"Tell him to drive in the park," she replied.

The cab rolled away, and for a minute there was nothing said. Then Vibois spoke.

"I know," he remarked.

"But you cannot know all," she cried. "It is too dreadful! I have tried so hard. I have done everything I could, and it has all been very difficult. I have no one to whom I can go for help or advice."

She was leaning back in the corner of the cab, her head thrown back listlessly, while her hands were tearing a rose that had fallen into her lap.

"You can't know how I hate him! how I despise him! You do not know him as I do, nor what it is to live with him and to feel that it must go on for years."

She paused and put her hand to her forehead.

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"I have tried," she continued, "but what is the use? Am I to go on year after year suffering as I do? Must I always bear it? Is it right that my life should be made miserable by what is no fault of mine? It is not just! Why should I have no joy, no love in my life? What have I done that I should have to bear it?"

Blessed are those who, to such a storm of questions, can answer:

"It is the hand of Heaven. Have patience and all will be well."

Vibois writhed. Why, indeed? And what could he say? Trite platitudes rose to his lips, but he scorned to offer them to a scarred heart. It was not dead words this woman needed. Not hackneyed sentences. Fighting alone against a host of sorrows, she craved the living sympathy of a living heart.

Vibois was silent, and the cab rolled on past other cabs coming and going. He was trying to formulate his thoughts, to find some phrase that would tell something of his feelings, but not too much. He wanted to help her, but he did not know how.

Hulda was silent, waiting for him to speak. Twice he began, only to stop before he said five words.

"Tell him to drive me home, please," she said at length, and her voice was tinged with disappointment.

"No!" said Vibois, "not yet! Let me do something for you. Let me help you in some way. Don't you see I would gladly do anything in my power, if I but knew how?"

They were passing a lamp and the light fell on her face. He saw the tears in her eyes and her brave lips tremble, and all the love he felt swept over him.

He put out his hand and laid it on one of her hands, but she drew it quickly away.

"Hulda," he said, "let me help you. If in no other way, let the knowledge that I love you—I who have loved no other woman—give you strength. I know how hard it is, I know all you have to bear, and I, too, suffer when you suffer. You are not alone, Hulda, for I love you."

"Stop!" she cried, "you must not! It is not right. I should not have come. But I was so sad, and I did not know where to turn for help. I thought perhaps you could help me, but not that way. I see it all clearly now. I must try to bear it. It is the only way. Tell him to drive me home, please."

When he had left her he drove to his apartments.

"She is a woman after all," he thought, "but such a woman! She will go on day after day suffering in silence, until——"

For six months Vibois kept out of her way. He knew he loved her too much to run any risks, and he had no wish to shatter his idol, even if by that means he would come into possession of the pieces. He gave himself up wholly to work, and meanwhile kept his eye on Jack Alton. The fellow was becoming a drunken wreck.

One day in May he received a letter from Hulda. It only said: "Please come this evening."

He went.

He found her dressed ready to go out.

"You once said you loved me," she said. "If you do, take me away. I can bear it no longer. I—oh, Henri, take me away!"

"Hulda," he said, "I love you still and I shall always love you."

"Then take me away," she cried. "Anywhere, I will go anywhere away from him."

Her cheeks were bright and her eyes glistened. Vibois hesitated.

"Do you mean——" he began.

"Yes," she replied, "I mean I will go with you. I love you. See!"

She held out her arms toward him. He took her in his arms, and she held up her face for the first sweet kiss, and then she looked up smiling.

A cab was waiting and they drove away. She let her head fall on his shoulder, and one arm she slipped round him.

His idol was tottering on the brink.

The cab rolled on, round many corners, through dark streets, and over rough pavements.

"Where is he taking us?" Hulda asked at last.

Vibois looked down into her face and smiled.

"To perdition!" he said quietly.

"What?" she cried, sitting up, and gazing at him with frightened eyes.

"To the realm of fallen idols," he said, "to the place of tarnished honour and vain regrets, and long days of self-accusation and growing dislike that lurk in the shadow of lost self-respect, to——"

"Stop!" she cried, covering her ears with her hands. "Stop! Oh, why do you say such things?"

"It is the truth, dearest," he replied gently, taking her hand; "to all these he is driving us, and I go willingly with you. I know well all that follows; but were it a thousand times worse I would go, if you wished, but with one regret."

"And that?" she asked.

"That the one true woman I have ever known has fallen from her high estate."

"Henri," she said, "tell him to drive me home, please."

The cab turned and bore them back. He to worship his idol, she to slow and soul-slaying torture. They did not speak as they rolled homewards, and at her door she would not let him help her to alight.

She climbed wearily up the steps and paused a minute at the door before she let herself in. Inside was all she hated. Outside—well, at least Vibois still loved her. She had not made him despise her. She had gone far, but he could forgive much. She had been tortured to madness. Yes, it was best!

She entered the hall and met a physician descending the stairs.

"Madam," he said, "I have sad news. Your husband has been run over. He can scarcely live until morning."

She put her hand on the wall to steady herself and then gazed closely in his face.

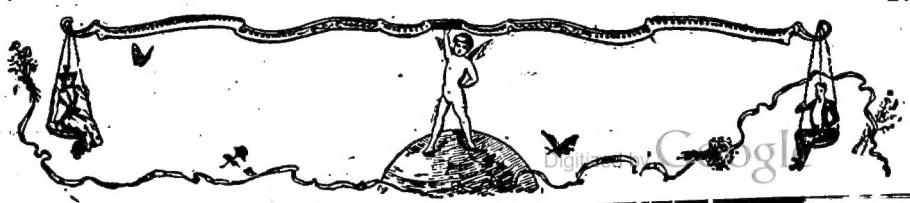
"Is it true?" she asked.

"Too true, I fear," he answered.

"Then," she said calmly, "I will go to him at once."

And she walked calmly up the stairs.

F. Gregory.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THE ENGINE-DRIVER'S DAUGHTER.

Kane Creek was a station on a branch-line of the Canadian North-West Railway, about two miles from the junction at Mercer. It was in the midst of a scrubby pine forest, with a sandy road running out from the trees on one side and into the trees on the other.

There were only two or three houses, a little general shop, with a porch like the visor of a military cap, and a school, all arranged in a scattered row along the line. The dusty station was an oasis in the midst of a timber desert, with a great many telegraph wires singing overhead.

A dozen trains whirled through Kane Creek every day with only a shriek of greeting and a wake of fine sand. Only two of them paid the slightest attention to the girl in a blue gingham dress who stood in the little look-out window.

One of them was a goods train, which stopped at Kane every time it came by for the conductor to hand the girl a bundle of yellow papers, and receive another like it in return. The other was the night "express," running at forty miles an hour.

This latter was a splendid train—ten carriages, with the finest engine on the road, big No. 606. As its glaring eye flashed round the bend in the direction of Mercer, the girl in the gingham dress often thought of the great train as a powerful and ferocious beast roaring westward on a race with the sun, and she knew the hand that guided it.

When the train was a mile away there were always two blasts of the whistle. Everyone in Kane thought they meant simply "Wake up, look out!" for that is what all locomotives say at every crossing, but the girl in the gingham dress heard, "Hallo, Polly!" and darted out on the platform and waved her handkerchief.

As the great train thundered nearer a hand was thrust from the engine, and, although it was usually dark, she could see the flutter of something white, and often, as the engine darted through the station, she heard the blurred sound of a voice and caught a glimpse of a grimy face and a blue jacket. Then she went back to her place in the little station with a sigh of content.

For it was a moment of great joy to Polly Marshall when her father's engine went through. Polly was in charge of the station at Kane Creek. Anyone could have told that a woman presided in the little station, for was there not always a bouquet in the window, and dainty pictures surrounding the grimy time-tables on the walls, and a kitten curling upon the doorstep?

At seventeen Polly had gone in as assistant to learn telegraphy, and when Clark, the "station-master," was promoted, the company had left the independent girl in charge. She and her father lived in one of the wooden houses a stone's-throw from the station, and since Polly's mother died they had been everything to each other.

Marshall was a big, silent man, and some of his companions thought him gruff and ill-tempered; but to Polly he was always as tender as a mother. Often when she was a mere girl he took her with him to Mercer on his engine, and he explained to her how the big black creature was started and stopped; what this brass crank was for, and how, when the engine squeaked here or squeaked there, a little oil was needed in this cup or in that crevice, and Polly had learnt to know an engine as well as she knew the neat little pantry in the house at home.

Indeed, she had more than once managed the levers and throttle, although it was very heavy work for a girl to do.

It was one night late in the autumn that Polly Marshall had need of all her knowledge of engines. She was sitting at her desk in the little look-out window, a shaded light throwing its rays down on her telegraph instruments and the sounding key clicking sleepily. Suddenly she was startled by the call of her number.

Instantly her fingers sought the keys, and she gave the answer that signified that she was all attention.

"Look out for——" clicked the sounder, and then it suddenly ceased, and try as she would, Polly could get no further communication from the station next to the eastward.

What could the trouble be? Polly sprang to her feet, remembering that the night express, of which her father was the driver, was the next train due. Could anything be the matter? She ran out on the dark platform to see that her lights were all in order, and that the switches were properly set, so that the express

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would slip past the station without an accident. Then she went back and called up Mercer.

"Can't you get Pullton?" she asked.

Pullton was the station which had sent her the warning so mysterious interrupted. She knew the operator at Pullton well. Every night he told her of the approach of her father's train, and whether or not it had left his station at the proper time.

"Pullton quiet. Can't get answer," was the report of the wires. "What's the matter?"

Polly answered as well as she could, and Mercer made another attempt to arouse Pullton.

Her father's train was now due. It should be whistling cheerily at the lower bend. Polly stepped out on the platform and peered up the line. Yes, there was the familiar headlight. She would have known it among a hundred.

Then came the whistle, "Hallo, Polly!" and Polly ran back into her office much relieved and sat down to warn Mercer.

At that instant she heard a peculiar cracking sound that sent her heart quivering deep in her bosom. Then there was the shrill scream of the locomotive whistle, suddenly interrupted as if the hand that had drawn the lever had been struck from its place.

Polly knew it was a cry of distress. It seemed to say "Help!" in a long, tremulous wail. Instantly Polly darted outside and flew up the line. Already the express should have thundered past the station, but she could see its headlight a hundred yards or more away.

With a hundred terrifying questions flashing through her mind, Polly ran on through the gloom. When she was within a few yards of the big head-light, she saw half-a-dozen armed men swarming round the engine, she heard fierce oaths, and then the engine started up again.

She saw in an instant that it had been cut free from the train. In the place where her father usually stood, there was a big, unfamiliar figure managing the lever and the throttle. Terrified, Polly sprang to one side into a clump of bushes. As the locomotive passed her on its way up the line she saw that the man who was driving wore a black mask on his face, and then she knew what had happened.

She understood why Pullton had tried to warn her and failed. Robbers had "held up" the train, and were preparing to rob the express carriage.

For a moment Polly was torn with doubt and terror. Had they shot her father? She knew that he never would submit to have his train captured without a struggle. Should she go to him? Then she remembered her station and the telegraph, and in a moment she was flying down the line towards the station. She would send for help to Mercer.

But squarely in front of the little station the locomotive stopped, and the black masked man sprang from the engine and darted across the platform. Hardly thinking what she was doing, Polly ran up on the other side of the engine, and, raising herself up, peered into the tender. She had half expected to see her father's dead body lying on the floor, for she had heard much about the terrible doings of train robbers.

Through the look-out window she could see the robber sitting at her own little desk in the station sending a message. It flashed over her all at once that he was wiring Mercer that the express was delayed, thus preventing any alarm. The robber had pushed up his mask, and she saw him plainly.

What should she do? She dared not enter the office, and she, a mere girl, could be of no service where the robbers were making their attack on the train.

At that moment three shots rang out, clear and distinct, from the detached train. The man at the telegraph instrument sprang to his feet, and ran to a side window in the waiting-room and looked up the line.

Now was her chance! Hardly thinking what she was doing, Polly threw back the reverse lever and opened the throttle steadily. The big steel wheels began to turn, very slowly at first. Farther and farther the throttle opened and faster and faster turned the wheels, and yet they did not go half fast enough to suit Polly, who was now glancing fearfully over her shoulder.

Suddenly the station door was thrown open, and she saw the robber darting up the line. He had a pistol in his hand. He was pointing it at her and shouting for her to stop, but the engine was now going at good speed, and, run as he would, the robber could not catch it. But he stopped and fired, the bullet whizzing over Polly's head.

The engine was now tearing down the line at full speed. Polly knew that it must be fired or it would not go far, and so, leaving the throttle open, she flung open the firehole, and with the heavy shovel in her small hands threw in load after load of coal.

When she returned to her place she could see the first signal light of Mercer already blinking into view. She pulled down on the whistle valve and the engine shrieked its distress.

Two minutes later Polly strained at the heavy reverse lever, turned hard on the airbrake and brought the great iron horse to a sudden standstill. How she ever managed to stammer the story she never knew, but in a few minutes the engine was speeding back with half a dozen armed men. Behind them came another load of men on a switch engine.

They heard the firing before they reached Kane Creek, but it ceased soon afterwards. The robbers had gone. They had taken with them much plunder from the passengers, but they had not been able to get the express safe open, although they were at work drilling when relief came.

From the time that the engine stopped Polly was missing. When the rescued and excited passengers and express messengers began to crowd round and inquire, the Mercer men remembered her. A party of them went out to find the girl who had brought help to the beleaguered train.

In a little clump of bushes they heard a man moaning, and an instant later they saw Polly kneeling in the sand with her father's head in her lap, crying bitterly, and they gathered up the brave engine driver and his daughter and carried them down to the train.

Marshall was not badly hurt, and he was able to be in Mercer when the general manager of the railway thanked the blushing Polly officially, and offered her a new and better position in Mercer. And of course, all the passengers and express messengers heard about Polly's brave deed and said a great many pleasant things about her, but Polly, being a sensible girl, only blushed and said that she had to do it, and that any other girl would have done the same under like circumstances. Which no one believed, of course.

Later, when the robbers were captured, Polly was able to identify one of them positively—the one who had run the engine—and through him the entire party was convicted and sentenced to long terms of imprisonment.

GEORGE ERNE.

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The Love that Was Lost.

She had charge of the glove counter in a large establishment, while he looked after the black goods across the way. She was plump and fair, with merry brown eyes, and hair that waved about her face in a most distracting manner—a faithful little soul, busy from morning till night, her stock in perfect order, and her manners to customers at once sweet and obliging.

He found that she was unselfish also, for she often helped to do the work of the girl who stood next to her—a delicate creature, who always looked tired.

In short, he had in his idle moments, or while arranging his sombre stock, learnt a great deal about his fair neighbour.

Her name was Helen Clare. Her favourite colour was pink. She had a small foot, and a musical voice.

It took him three months to find this out, and with it came the knowledge that he was deeply, hopelessly in love with her.

As yet, their acquaintance had progressed but little further than a "good morning" as they took their places each day. Prudence suggested to him that it would be as well for it to end there.

On his salary of twenty shillings a week he supported his mother and himself. Could he ask such a girl as Helen to share the future he saw before them?

Whether it was the effect of his hopeless love or the close confinement at the shop, he grew thin and pale, and his large eyes looked so melancholy that the clerks christened him "Mournful Harry," and joked about his funeral goods. Helen seemed to grow pinker and prettier every day.

At last, one night, they passed out of the shop together. It was raining and he offered to take her to the tram under his umbrella. He found to his joy that she walked home, and that she lodged with an aunt very near where he and his mother lived in modest apartments.

So it came to pass that they often went home together. Her aunt found that she used to know his mother, and that they were very respectable people indeed. After that the acquaintance progressed rapidly.

With her merry talk, and still merrier laugh, she tried to cheer up his spirits, and he, warming under the influence of her smiles, found himself quite another being.

But this could not last. The more he loved her, the drearier the future seemed, for he could not ask her to marry him. She divined his feelings and in her innocence of heart felt that she loved him in return.

Several months had passed this way, when one evening Harry came over with some wonderful news. An uncle of his had come to see them, who owned some land in Australia. Noticing Harry's failing health, he offered to give him some land and pay the passage out for his mother and himself if they would go out there and live.

"He says it is a grand country and that I shall have better health and far better prospects there," explained Harry eagerly. "Oh, Helen, if I could only take you!"

But he did not ask her to go, and he was too honourable to bind her by any promise to wait for him.

In a year at most he would be well enough off to send for her. No doubt of success crossed his mind. If he had been melancholy before, he was jubilant now, as he thought what this great chance meant for him.

So he went away. She missed him, of course, but being a very sensible person made herself as comfortable and as happy as possible. The day came, however, when her step lagged and the colour left her cheeks. Harry's letters at first were wildly enthusiastic. It was a glorious country. The pure air and the outdoor life were making a new man of him. His mother liked it, although it was lonely. He had built a cosy house with his own hands.

It took him several months to get down to dry facts. Then he wrote that there had been a drought. Everybody told him he must not expect to make anything this year. It would certainly be better another season. After that, weeks passed without a word.

The long, hot summer was drawing to a close. Helen had lost all her pretty colour, and her big brown eyes had a pathetic look. In the autumn she received another letter that explained his silence. It told of trouble and disaster to crops and stock.

She went to the shop and took her place. But her feelings got the better of her and she laid her head on the counter and cried. Someone stepped in front of her and said kindly:

"Are you in trouble, Miss Clare?"

It was the senior partner, Mr. Seaforth.

Helen dried her tears quickly, she felt very much in awe of him, although he had always been exceedingly kind. She remembered after she had answered him, and he had passed on, that he had been very thoughtful for her of late.

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He rarely passed the counter without a pleasant word or look for her. A year ago she had fitted black gloves to the plump hands of his little daughters, and watched them trip out of the door of the shop to their carriage, attended by their governess. They had just lost their mother.

At last, one morning, after weeks of keeping up by exerting her will power, Helen could not get up. Her aunt, quite alarmed, sent for the doctor. He said all she needed was rest and quiet.

The next day someone sent a box of lovely roses. The next day, a basket of fruit; and, finally, one morning, when she was able to sit up, her aunt came to her, with a look of amazement mingled with triumph, saying that some ne wanted to see her in the parlour.

Then, as the girl started to go down, her aunt caught her hand and said pleadingly:

"Be sensible, Helen, do be sensible!"

On entering the room Helen was surprised to see Mr. Seaforth waiting.

She was still more surprised to hear what he had to say.

He was a fine-looking man, with iron-grey hair and clear eyes—very kindly eyes, she thought, as he told her that he wanted to marry her. He did not say that he loved her—and that hurt her a little. This practical little girl had a romantic side to her nature; carefully kept in the background 'tis true, but still there.

"You are just the one I want for a mother to my little girls," he said. "I have been thinking of this for a long time, and I think I could make you happy."

She thought a moment, then with quivering lips told him of Harry Graves. He smiled, as if pleased with her frankness.

"I know all about that; but I understood that you were free or I would not have spoken. Don't answer me now—take a week to think it over."

After he left, Helen flung herself on the couch and cried for a long time. Her aunt looked in, but went away again very softly.

A week later Helen made her choice, and before her fellow employés had time to recover their breath after the astonishing news, had married the senior partner, had been to Paris for the honeymoon, and was settled in her beautiful new home.

There she soon won the hearts of her little step-daughters and had the reins of household affairs well in her firm little hands. Mr. Seaforth had been a good judge of character. She was a capital housekeeper, a firm yet loving step-mother, and under her rule all the rough places in his life seemed to be smoothed over.

There was nearly a year of this life, when one day as Helen came out of a shop to enter her carriage, someone touched her arm. She turned and saw Harry Graves.

She hardly knew him at first. He was gaunt and thin. His clothes were ill-fitting, and his hands looked hard and brown. Under his wide brimmed hat were the same dark eyes—only now they had a wild look that terrified her.

"Why, Harry," she cried, offering her hand, "when did you get back?"

He said nothing and seemed not to see her hand. He looked at the coachman in his fur cape, at the dainty little carriage, with its green satin cushions, then at her, clad in rich furs and picturesque hat.

"Won't you come home with me to dinner?" she asked timidly. "I would like you to meet my husband."

He shook his head and murmured hoarsely:

"I am going back to Australia. I only came—I did not know."

Then he turned his head away.

She got into the carriage and laid her head back upon the cushions. She was very pale. The coachman shut the door with a sharp slam, then drove away.

She sat for a while as in a dream. Once her lips moved as she whispered:

"Poor Harry, I had forgotten him."

She dressed as usual for dinner, said good-night to the two little girls who were in the nursery, then sat by the library fire and waited for her husband.

The carriage had been gone a long time, and still he did not come. He was usually the most punctual of men.

At last she began to worry; a terrible thought came into her head. How wild Harry looked, what if—oh, why did he not come?

At last there was the sound of wheels and someone entered the side door. She arose, her heart beating wildly.

Just then the butler came to the library door.

"There has been a little accident, ma'am, and the master——"

She heard no more. With a scream she rushed past him into the hall, then into the arms of her husband, who was just removing his muddy and dripping coat. Then she hung about his neck sobbing and murmuring words of endearment.

"Why, Helen!" he cried. "Helen!"

His face seemed transfigured as he bent over her, and gently drew her into the library. The butler retired to the kitchen.

"The dinner is just about spoilt," said the cook gloomily.

"Never mind," chuckled James, "they won't never know the difference."

"What's the matter?" cried the children's maid. "I thought I heard somebody scream!"

The butler told them.

"She loves him, then," said the cook, as if surprised.

"I should say so—that lovely new dress against his muddy coat," replied the maid. "What did he do, James?"

"Do," said James scornfully, "what 'ud any man do with a pair of pretty arms round his neck? I must say he acted quite like a young man, did master."

The cook, who was a grass widow, sighed as she stirred her soup, while the maid blushed and looked coquettishly at James.

* * * * *

On the deck of a second rate steamer, sat a man with a wide-brimmed hat pulled over his eyes. He was quite motionless for hours as if absorbed in thought. He seemed unconscious of everything. Above the noise of wind, wave and machinery, another sound seemed ever in his ears—a sound that had been like a death knell to his hopes. It was the slam of a carriage door.

Agnes Ferrers.

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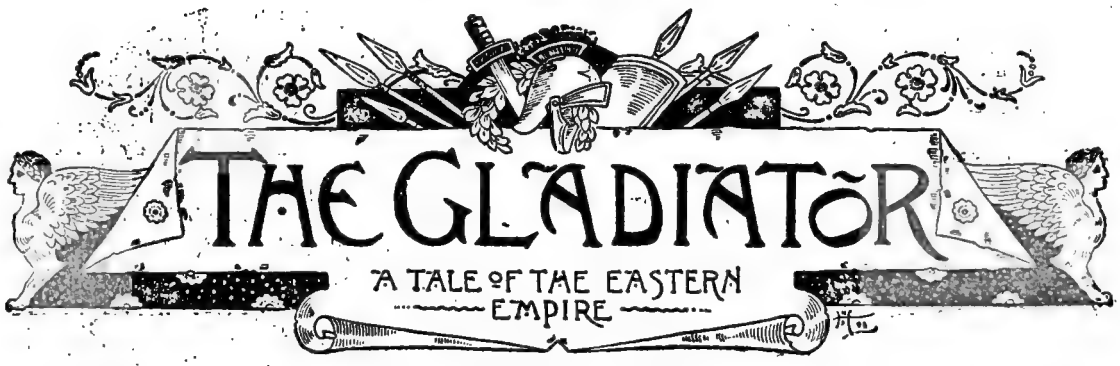

By GEORGE C. WALLIS.

SUMMARY OF PART I.

The opposing factions in the public games of ancient Constantinople were known as the "Blues and Greens." The Emperor and Empress favoured the Blues, and consequently the enmity that existed between the two factions was so strong that they could not meet in the streets without coming to blows.

Rhesus, a country youth from Sicily, lands at Constantinople with his friend, Proclus, and with a fixed determination to become famous as a gladiator. He adopts the cause of the Greens, and the first contest in which he takes part is a chariot race, which he would have won had it not been for the foul play of Hermiot, his opponent of the Blues.

Rhesus falls in love with Eutasia, a pretty little waif of the circus, of twelve years, who speedily becomes warmly attached to him.

A few years pass and Eutasia is affianced to Rhesus.

One night Proclus and Rhesus chance to overhear a plot between Hypatius, a claimant to the throne, Marcen, a gladiator of the green faction, and Hermiot of the Blues, to raise the city in revolt, remove Justinian from the throne, and make Hypatius emperor in his place.

Hypatius proceeds to take them singly down to the flooded catacombs under the ground upon which they are standing, where he has vast treasures stored with which he purposes to buy the sympathies of the people. Marcen goes with him first, leaving Hermiot on the watch. Rhesus and Proclus spring out upon Hermiot, bind and gag him. Upon the return of Hypatius and Marcen, Proclus assumes the blue sash of Hermiot, personates Hermiot under the cover of the darkness, and goes down into the catacombs with Hypatius in order to discover the whereabouts of the treasure.

Meanwhile it occurs to Marcen that if he were to cut off the only means of egress from the catacombs, his fellow conspirators will be heard of no more, and he will be the sole possessor of the hidden treasure. He returns to the entrance of the catacombs, followed by Rhesus, who watches him carry out his murderous designs. Marcen discovers the presence of Rhesus and rushes at him. Rhesus eludes him, and a hot chase follows. Rhesus finally gives Marcen the slip, and, together with Pelak, a charioteer of the Greens, returns to the catacombs in order to release his friend Proclus. Upon arriving there, however, they find someone has been before them, and the place is empty.

PART THE SECOND.

"In the Toils of Treachery."

CHAPTER I.

The Key of the Treasure.

Overworn with exertion and want of sleep, Rhesus came up the stairs and let the stone fall into its place again. Then, judging that no attempt would be made upon the treasure during the day, he arranged to meet Pelak the following night just after dusk, and the two parted, Rhesus making the best speed possible towards home.

To his inexpressible joy, who should meet him as he entered the peristyle but his friend, dressed in his usual attire. He thanked the gods for it, and for all his stoicism, his eyes were dim with unshed tears. He sank on the couch exhausted, and as Proclus bade the slaves wash his feet, and set before him a draught of reviving wine, and a goodly meal, he told the exciting incidents of the night.

"It seems to me," he said in conclusion, "that we have been drawn into a most complicated conspiracy, and one that is likely to bring us into trouble."

Proclus did not answer at first, but stood gazing through the casement into the dark-avenued garden in silence, nor until Rhesus had finished the meal did he speak.

"You have assuredly had a busy night," he said, "and a most narrow escape, and now, I should think, you will begin to see the reason of my cynicism. Who is there one can trust in this accursed city; who worth one's consideration, saving only as to what service can be got out of them? A plague on them all! But that's neither the one thing nor the other. Plot or no plot, it will go hard with us if we cannot get enough of that tremendous hoard in the Hall of Waters to make your fortune and replenish mine—I am a sad squanderer—and enable us to shake the dust of this corrupted place from our feet for ever. I am weary of it all, and I think I will travel. And think what a fortune would mean to you, Rhesus! Power, name, Eutasia, and the opening of your father's door to you again. We must foil these traitors, and particularly that arch-villain, Marcen—who is no doubt on your track even now—and secure this treasure for ourselves."

"But how, Proclus?"

"That you will understand better when I have answered your first question as to my adventures while you were racing over the city."

Then he told Rhesus of the Hall of Waters, which many knew by repute, but few had seen, owing to the few inroads to it, and the danger of getting lost therein—small though it really was—where the treasure was secreted, how vast it was, and how he and Pompey and Hypatius came to the top of the stairs to find the stone fast.

"And you were so near and acted so foolishly," he went on. "Well, that is over. One cannot pluck good opportunities from the clutch of the flying past. I must own that I felt the chill of the shades on my face, Rhesus, when the stone refused to move, but fortunately I preserved my disguise as Hermiot and kept my tongue pretty still. The brothers suspected Marcen at once, and said so—I felt sure of it, but affected to laugh the idea to scorn. The torches we had steadily burnt down, until at last we each held one alight and had no more. Then the others gave way to utter despair. I left them, and in a careless, aimless manner, went alone down the steps and back to the treasure. Anything was better than inaction.

"About half way down the last passage I noticed a curious projection on the left wall, make the sloping tunnel at that place rather narrow, and a close scrutiny showed

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that the broad stone which stood out was of a different nature to the wall. It was smooth and shining, where that was rough and dull, and had sundry tracings cut on its face. Holding my flaring torch close to these tracings, I saw at once that it was an inscription in the ancient Assyrian characters, which I—and two others only—had learnt to decipher when I studied at Athens. So far as I know, no one in Constantinople, saving myself, can read them, and therefore the plotters had passed them by—as, doubtless, plotters and criminals and refugees have passed them by for generations—in ignorance. I hastened to read the inscription, thinking to perchance discover a way of escape. With patience and the exercise of memory, I translated it, and in our tongue it would run thus:

"'I, Imgur, once the favourite of Hatensit, the Queen "of Nineveh, being cast into this noisome dungeon to "die, do hereby bequeath my hatred to the world in its "folly and sin, and hurl my maledictions at her whose "wayward fancy has thus requited my loyal service and "deep love. And lest any should be cast here in the self- "same plight, in this foul vault under this far fortress of "our empire, I leave behind me the key of this sliding "stone; so peradventure, when the assassins come to "finish their task, they may, like me, move back the "stone and seek death instead in the quiet water below, "in the blackness of the pool that is so near my prison. "Search diligently the edges of this stone until thou "seest a small round hole on each side—a hole that "will admit the passage of a finger—and then count "two stones away downward from the right-hand hole. "The third will yield to the pressure of the hand at "either end, swinging on a central pivot, and in the "dark recess behind is a long slender key that fits the "holes above. Place it therein and turn it twice "round, and the stone will fall across the passage or "recede to its resting-place, according as it may be at "the time. This secret was told me by one who loved "me, but whom I loved not; one who knew of my "doom and could not help me otherwise; one, who for "love of me, bought it from the builder of the fortress "with her kisses, and then slew him.'

"It was no message of hope for a man to read who felt that the same or a worse doom was his," went on Proclus, "but it took my thoughts away from my own misery for a while, and I stood in mute contemplation of the writing and the memory of the ages and the nations that have passed since the hand of Imgur scratched it on the stone; and I reflected that if that deep dungeon was there in his day it must be old indeed—older, perchance, than the Christians would have us believe the world to be. But presently my thoughts took a fresh turn. If Imgur's writing was true and the key was still in its recess, it was in my power to close up the passage and bar the way, and I alone would know the secret.

"With trembling hands—for, for the moment, I had forgotten the helplessness of my position—I found the swinging slab and the key behind it, and with a grim smile of exultation, pressed it in the small hole on the left of the smooth rock and turned it twice. By the expiring flame of my torch I saw the great mass move forward from the top, with a slow falling motion. Noiselessly, almost steadily it came down, and at last settled with a dull shock upon the floor. It rose to the roof and touched both sides, filling the square of the passage. And then my torch began to flicker with the last efforts of its flame.

"The horror of my situation came back upon me in full force then, and I hesitated, before I rowed back and joined the others, whether to keep the key or not. However, I placed it in the folds of my sleeve, and went back, landing at the foot of the steps as the last red ember of the pine-branch smouldered out, and stumbled to the top. The other two sat in darkness also, but just as I reached them

"I hastened to read the inscription."

footsteps sounded overhead and a heavy crash, and presently the flag was raised, dim light shone down, and someone cried to us to come out. That someone was——"

"Hermiot!" cried Rhesus, remembering that he had escaped.

"No," said Proclus, "Marcen. Who more likely?"

"But he wished to imprison you all there until you died of starvation!" Rhesus cried. "And I saw him in the chariot of the Empress not long before I came to rescue you."

"That may be," said his friend. "But who more likely than he, I repeat, when he knew that you had discovered his treachery and evaded his vengeance? And, surely, the steeds of the Empress would take him thither swifter than you or Pelak could walk. And he was in great haste, too, and laid our imprisonment to your charge. We needed little bidding to leave the gruesome place and get out of the mephitic exhalations that were suffocating us slowly, and still preserving my identity concealed, I made excuse to be away on urgent business. As I ran round the angle of the wall I saw a couple of monks bending over the prostrate form of Hermiot and unloosing his bonds. I barely got out of sight before he was liberated, and my last glance back from the shelter of an empty dwelling's portal was of the meeting of the four plotters and their expressions of consternation and amazement. I stayed to see no more, but came here without delay, intending to seek you when I had changed my attire and eaten. And now you are here."

"But who wrote my name in the dust where Hermiot had been?" asked Rhesus, bewildered.

"Who else, again, but Marcen, to show that he knew you? We shall have to play our game with subtle skill, Rhesus, to overmatch that arch-traitor, but I think I have the best of matters so far, in possessing this key, even if he suspects its existence and that I have it."

"But he cannot know of it at all, nor of your identity when you personated Hermiot!" cried Rhesus incredulously. "And why carry it about with you—why not have left it in the secret recess?"

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Pelak knocked thrice.

"My young friend," said Proclus gravely, "I will wager that he knows already that it was I who took Hermiot's place. Think. He was, up to to-day, a champion of the Green, yet we know him to be in league with the Empress, who favours the Blue. He is a traitor to both factions, then—to Theodora as well, very likely—and he means as we do, to secure this treasure for himself. He will have spies everywhere—amongst the slaves of his own household, in the palace, at the hippodrome—and they will by this time have told him of our movements last night, when I returned, and how, and where your friend Pelak now is. He will see at once that we know the secret, and will argue, from the fact that we stay at home, that we have either set men to watch the entrance or have discovered something that he has not.

"To lead him astray I have already sent two experienced ruffians to keep an eye on the convent and report to me his doings. As for keeping the key, Rhesus, there is no other way, for the secret recess is on the lower side of the great rock door, and the door is shut. It is a curious piece of workmanship, is it not?"

He drew from his sleeve very carefully a long thin rod of bronze, with a curious design cut into one end and a round handle formed at the other.

"It is very old," said Rhesus, examining it with interest, "and it would be difficult to imitate. We must guard it well. And much as I should like the half of this wealth, for it would mean, as you say, Eutasia and home for me—I think we had better let it be in safety for awhile let the ides of January pass, and see whether Hypatius relinquishes his plot or no."

"That will be the better plan," said Proclus. "And when you are rested we will go and make arrangements with old Sibron for the games, and see Eutasia."

CHAPTER II.

In the Shadow of St. Sophia.

When Marcen escaped from the *mêlée* in his patron's chariot, he was raging bitterly at his foolishness in not having been more careful when he entered the convent for the second time. Yet he masked his chagrin with a good-humoured smile as he turned to answer Theodora's questions.

"It is true, your Majesty," he said, "that I have not yet discovered the exact whereabouts of this hidden treasure, but I know that it is somewhere near the Convent of St. Conan. Will your Majesty drive me thither swiftly? I was on my way there to keep watch on these conspirators, when I got entangled in this rabble."

And in his mind, Marcen was at that very moment resolving to liberate the said conspirators, since by so doing he could shift the blame of their imprisonment on other shoulders. They were certain to be rescued, now Rhesus and perhaps others knew of their position; and who better fitted to free them than himself?

Whilst he thought, Theodora gave orders to her driver, and they were rolled rapidly across the city. On the way the Empress pursued her queries, Marcen answering as vaguely as possible; and reposing a fuller confidence in him than was usual with her, she agreed to let the plot of Hypatius go on until the day of its *dénouement*, and then unmask all the traitors at once and wring the secret of the wealth from them.

"Always providing, my Marcen," she said, with a warning gesture, "that you do not discover it yourself in the meantime."

"Always providing that," he echoed, smiling inscrutably. "And before I leave the sun of your presence, Majesty, for the darkness of this intrigue, I would pray of you a favour that you can easily grant."

"Say on, most useful of men. There is much I would give you for your past services alone."

"It is only a little matter to you, perhaps, Empress, but it means a great deal to me. There is a maid I love to distraction, and whom, I have courage to believe, I could teach to love me in return by the time she comes of marriageable age; but she is kept at the house of crusty old Sibron, under the patronage and love-designs of that very Rhesus I spoke of to you yesterday, that meddling country youth, who flaunts his paganism in our faces and has been overheard to utter veiled treason. Could you buy this maid for your own service in the palace, I might yet hope. Her name is Eutasia, and a pretty little golden-haired witch she is."

"I have seen the wilful jade often," said Theodora. "It is a thousand pities that she is not given a better chance in life. I grant you your request without more words. She shall enter the palace this very day."

And leaving Marcen returning thanks with a real gratitude, the Royal harpy drove away.

Marcen turned down the passage and set free his friends, as Proclus has told us; but his confidence received a ruder shock than it had yet done when he found that Hermiot had never been in the Hall of Waters—that someone unknown had been in his place, penetrated their whole secret, and yet got away safely and still unknown. He raved and called on all the saints in the calendar, and blank surprise and deadly fear sat heavily on the faces of his three friends.

"It is the work of that pair of wretches who thought me their friend!" he cried. "'Tis Rhesus and Proclus who have spied on us and unearthed our plans! It is clear that we cannot pursue our scheme at present. We must wait."

"But why, and for what?" asked Hypatius.

"Because our intentions are known and our secret also, and the slightest move on our part would bring all to public notice. At the same time they know we are desperate men, and beyond trying to secure the treasure themselves, wil

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not molest us if we refrain from action. In that case we must set a watch on the convent and endeavour to trap them here or elsewhere, and make away with them quietly. Failing that we shall doubtless find means to bring about their ruin at the circus, for a riot is almost certain when the games begin, and it is hinted that Justinian contemplates strong measures if the green faction proves troublesome. After that, we shall be free to proceed with our project."

Deceived by the words of their co-plotter, the three men agreed to his plan, and promising that the convent should be well watched and guarded, parted with assurances of mutual fidelity.

Marcen, too cautious to return to his own house now that the news of his change of colour was abroad, sought the private palace of Theodora, on the shores of Propontis, and there, later in the day, received and welcomed little Eutasia in her new finery of silk embroidered robes and pearl-crusted tiara. She, not knowing but that the hour of her good fortune had arrived, greeted him merrily, and was full of praise for the great Theodora, who, seeing in her a useful tool for the future, had exercised upon the impressionable girl those graces of speech and manner that had won her so much in the past.

But there was a note of regret in the girl's happiness because she had not bidden farewell to her Rhesus, because he did not know of her success; and Marcen, inwardly full of wrath at her fancy, had to promise that he would bring them together in the garden next day.

"It is a perilous thing to do," said he, "for the green badge is not in favour here, and there are sharp-eyed spies in hiding everywhere. But I will risk much for you, my blue-eyed beauty, and I will bring Rhesus—if he dares to come!"

The giant staggered for an instant.

"Rhesus will dare anything for me, because he loves me," said Eutasia boldly, "but you must be careful, Marcen, or I shall not like you. Tell him I will walk in the garden every night, under the trees over there, with the leaves of gold."

Marcen repeated his promise, and with less reluctance now, for his fertile brain saw a chance of making his rival's love lead to his rival's destruction, and before night fell, he had made his preparations.

* * * * *

Rhesus, not knowing the depth of the world's cunning, fell easily into the trap. When he and his friend entered the hippodrome and greeted old Sibron heartily, they found him strangely silent and morose. He answered their questions regarding the condition of the horses and bears, and who was to drive in the race, and how the betting stood, very grudgingly and shortly, and listened to their nocturnal adventure with scant attention. At last Rhesus grew impatient, and asked where Eutasia was, who was usually so ready to meet him in the portico. Sibron's brow blackened yet more at that, and he replied:

"It is just that saucy minx who troubles me. She has gone."

"Gone!" shouted Rhesus. "Where? By Zeus, but if you have let her come to any harm, you and I are friends no more, old fox!"

"A thousand maledictions rest on me!" cried Sibron, "but, in faith, I had no choice. 'Tis not so long ago, but just after dawn, that the Empress came dashing up in her golden car, and seeming to have forgotten her enmity to our colour, bade me bring the little maid to her. Though suspecting something wrong, I was unable to make excuse, and so, nothing loth, I can tell you, the little one came smiling and spoke a pretty greeting to Theodora. The Empress talked very flatteringly of her beauty and charm, and in the end asked her to become one of her serving girls in the palace. Eutasia drew back from the thought at first, wondering if you would like it, but Theodora painted such a picture of bright scenes and gay companies and rich dresses and an amplitude of gold, that the maid would have no nay but she must go; and when asked to go there and then, was in transports of delight. I would have dissuaded her, but she tossed her head impatiently, and, Theodora pressed for a decision; and when a sovereign requests she commands. So she has left us, and it seems to me as though the sun shines not so brightly as it shone yesterday."

"And left she no message for me?" asked Rhesus, growing cold with fear.

"She had no time, so imperious and urgent was her Majesty, but she did slip this into my hand unperceived, and bid me give it to you. And I knew no more."

"This" was a thin ring of gold that Rhesus had beaten out for her from an old coin, and which she had worn ever since, and he placed on his little finger straightway. And how often, in danger and despair, in solitude and sorrow, on distant seas and in a far land, did that tiny memento revive his courage and recall her face.

"You should have kept her from that harpy's clutches at least a day, until I had seen her," said Rhesus. "However, all is not yet lost. Gold will do much amongst the pampered minions of the palace, and I shall snatch my jewel from the Empress and Marcen yet—for this is his doing,

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I'll swear. Do not grieve so, my worthy Sibron; if I can hope, who have lost all if I have lost her, you need not despair. Let us put our heads together, and we will confound the plots of all these renegades and wretches. The gods help those who help themselves, and Rhesus the Roman, as the urchins of the gutters call me, is on his mettle! We have frustrated one sedition already; we will prove that strong arms and resolute wills can do yet more!"

The old man, steeped in the cunning of the time, smiled grimly at the younger's determination—and Proclus made a cynical grimace, but as the first promised secrecy and advice and the latter declared that he would help with all his heart and soul, Rhesus went away more buoyant than the position warranted.

The city was already seething with the ferment of the approaching holiday; the drivers of the chariots practised daily in the circus, and more than one met his death at the hands of the roving assassins who hourly grew more insolent; the arrogance and oppressions of the blues grew steadily more intense; and so Rhesus had need of care in his nightly efforts to get speech with his stolen love. He bribed several of the sentinels to let him into the palace gardens after dusk, and once got right to the casement of Theodora's gilded chamber and peered in; but the one he sought he saw not. Sometimes Proclus went with him, sometimes Pelak the charioteer, and sometimes—though seldom—grey-haired Sibron himself, whose rough nature his fair charge had softened wonderfully; but as the days went by and they were still successless, Rhesus began to despair.

He placed the wet edge of his keen blade on his throat.

At last, on the eve of the fête-day, he encountered Pelak in the gate of the arena, and saw good tidings written on his face. They passed along the palace front without a word, looking to their weapons as they went; and not until they stood in the shadow of the battlemented walls of St. Sophia, did Rhesus ask what news. Pelak answered; "The best." He had bribed his way judiciously with the money Rhesus had given him, to the inner parts of the imperial residence, and had discovered there an old friend long lost. He had found that Eutasia usually escaped into the garden an hour before midnight, but only for a short time and always watched; and that Marcen now lived in the palace and was with her every day.

"My friend gave me instructions how to evade the outer guards easily," said Pelak. "So you must take note of what I say. Follow me in silence, now."

They emerged from the shadow and crossed the open space towards the palace again, then skirted the fortress-like wall of the garden until they came to a small gate. On this Pelak knocked thrice, and it was at once opened. They passed in in silence, and in silence a shrouded figure closed it behind them. They stood on the edge of a thick grove of fragrant-smelling sandal trees now, and the two great domes of the palace, as well as some of the statues and pillars of Parian marble about it, stood out dimly vast in the starlight. Pelak then plunged into the grove, the other following, and at the farther side, where grew a bed of brilliant flowers, and beyond which waved a row of artificial trees with foliage of beaten gold and birds of wood with jewelled wings perched in their branches—a luxury bought with the ransom of many humble lives—stopped, and bade Rhesus, in a whisper, go on.

"Cross the open space quickly," he said, "and shelter under the third tree. If the sentry sees you in passing, you will know how to deal with him—and you must not hesitate. If the soldier on this side sees you, I shall be ready. And if we are discovered by Marcen we must climb the wall about a dozen paces below the gate. Hasten."

Rhesus needed no telling, for now was his chance or never. The night was in his favour, and he sped across the well-kept paths with the feet of a deer and gained the shade of the costly trees, and there looked towards the palace that held his love.

Lights multitudinous gleamed from the marble casements and shone on the statuary of the balconies and the garden; the sound of light laughter and the tinkle of wine-cups came from the banquet-room where Theodora—comedian, profligate, and Empress—dispensed her hospitality to her favourites of the hour; and presently, on the spice-laden air, rang the wild, gay notes of a Bacchanal song. And in that nest of intrigue and infamy, of wine and wealth and wickedness, his sweet Eutasia was a prisoner—a willing prisoner, perchance—a victim to the glamour of its gold, the exquisite aroma of its Maronean wine, and the flattery and false tales of Marcen the renegade, his bitterest foe!

As he gazed at that splendid pile and thought these rankling thoughts, a figure moved across the grass towards him with a measured tread. A battle-axe glinted as it swung in his hand, and as he passed within an arm's length of where Rhesus stood, the latter saw that he was a Briton from the far-west isles. A brawny, iron-limbed man with great sinews, a type of the men who had made the Imperial Guard a terror to all rebels, and the pride of their master. Twice he passed Rhesus unsuspectingly, before she for whom that waiting heart yearned came pacing slowly down the path, and entered the little avenue.

In a flutter of excitement, Rhesus stepped forward to fashion out the fair vision more clearly from the dimness,

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and for that one moment forgot the sentinel. He had just passed, but heard the rustle of the movement and turned his head. Rhesus had no time, nor choice. He sprang forward suddenly, ere the other could move, placed his foot against the Briton's back, his arms round his neck, and put forth all his strength. The giant staggered for an instant and an inarticulate gurgle came from his throat; he reeled, something in his neck gave way, cracking with a horrible sound, and over they both rolled on the soft turf. When Rhesus freed himself the other lay dead, and Eutasia was at his side, terror in her wide blue eyes. He seized her hand and drew her under the trees.

"I had to do it for my life's sake and yours, Merry-one," said he, between the kisses that, despite her reluctance, he bestowed upon her, "and now—and now—" And now the words of advice and appeal he had thought would be so ready, suddenly failed him.

"What have you done, Rhesus?" she asked, struggling out of his embrace and glancing hurriedly at the silent figure on the grass. "You have neglected me and my messages these nine days, and now you condescend to come you must needs slay Beric—an honest and good-natured soldier, who was only doing his duty. And you gave him no chance of defence, you coward!"

She attitudinised before him like a comedy-queen-of-passion, and but for the danger of the position, Rhesus could have laughed aloud at her youthful gravity, and praised her ruddy beauty at one and the same time. But instead he took her hand and spoke seriously.

"I had to kill him, child, or he would have given the alarm, and we might both have been slain or imprisoned. And I want to get you away from here quietly; if not to-night, to-morrow-eve—this painted palace of revelry is no place for your sweet soul."

"Why, Rhesus?" she asked, drawing away from him again. "You talk strangely to-night. I thought you would have been glad because of my good-luck in getting here, where everything is nice and one is always merry. I thought you loved me; I shall think Marcen is better than you, for he says that I have done well and shall be a great lady some day if he can have his way."

"He is a lying villain!" cried Rhesus impetuously. "He has attempted my life already, and has only lured you here to keep you out of my way. Don't trust him; don't believe him at all. I will tell you why when I have more time. If you love me as you used to do, Eutasia—as I love you—be ready to meet me here to-morrow night while the feast of the games is being eaten in the banquet-room, and I will take you to a place of safety. I shall have riches soon, and we can leave the city and go far away."

Eutasia hesitated a moment, then pouted.

"I don't want to go away from here. It is gay and pleasant, and I have always lived in the city.. And I don't believe Marcen is as bad as you say; you are jealous, that is all. I will not go, Rhesus, and if you like me you will let me have my own way. If you had liked me you would have answered the little letters I sent you. But you know where to find me now, and I must go in before they miss Beric, and come to seek him."

"Eutasia!" he cried, as she turned away, "stay only a moment! let me tell you why! see how I cherish your ring! Ah!"

A warning whistle came from the grove behind, waving lights were approaching from the palace, and voices called to each other. Rhesus had but one glimpse of her pretty face, wreathed with petulance, as she cried: "Hasten, Rhesus, for your life!" and of her light form flitting over the sward; then he turned and ran for the sandal trees and joined Pelak. They gained the wall unseen, and clambered over, grazing their shins and knuckles in their hurry, and fled beside the church, in the deep shadow of its sacred stones.

As they went three men suddenly stepped out from a little recess and stood before them with bows drawn, and discharging their arrows simultaneously, rushed forward with spiked maces in hand. Pelak fell with a shaft in his breast, but as he went down, his battle-axe flew from his hand with true aim, and clove open the head of the foremost assassin. The second Rhesus disabled with his sword at first stroke, and the third, seeing his reckless daring, took to his heels without a blow. Rhesus wasted no time in pursuit, but sank on his knees beside Pelak and strove to restore animation to his still form.

It was useless, and registering a deep vow by all the gods to bring retribution on the slayers, or those who had set them on, he went over to where the wounded man lay groaning, and placed the wet edge of his keen blade on his throat.

"One movement, one cry, and I press down this sword," he said. "Tell me, in a word, who paid you and your comrades to waylay us here?"

The man was silent; defiance was in his eyes.

"Answer, and truly, or I end your wretched life here and now!" cried Rhesus. "If I leave you you will be found, and may recover. Answer, or meet your end. Who paid you?"

"Marcen, the gladiator," he said sullenly.

Not deigning him another word, Rhesus put back his blade in its sheath and left him, and picking up the body of Pelak, bore it to his home. And he knew not which was the heavier weight—the burden upon his shoulders, or the burden of sorrow upon his soul at the words Eutasia had spoken in the garden.

(To be continued.)

TO READERS WHO HAVE FRIENDS ABROAD.

The Number of PEARSON'S WEEKLY dated July 16th will be known as the

GREAT COLONIAL NUMBER.

The Editorial Chair will be temporarily occupied by a well-known Colonial Journalist at present in London, and, with the exception of one or two regular features, all the contents will be contributed by readers scattered throughout our Colonies.

A new Competition for Foreign and Colonial Readers only will be announced, and substantial prizes will be offered.

All the articles have been written by contributors who know exactly what they are talking about, and the facts are all fresh and little known.

If you have friends or relatives abroad who do not get "P.W." regularly, send them a copy of this special number. They will thank you.

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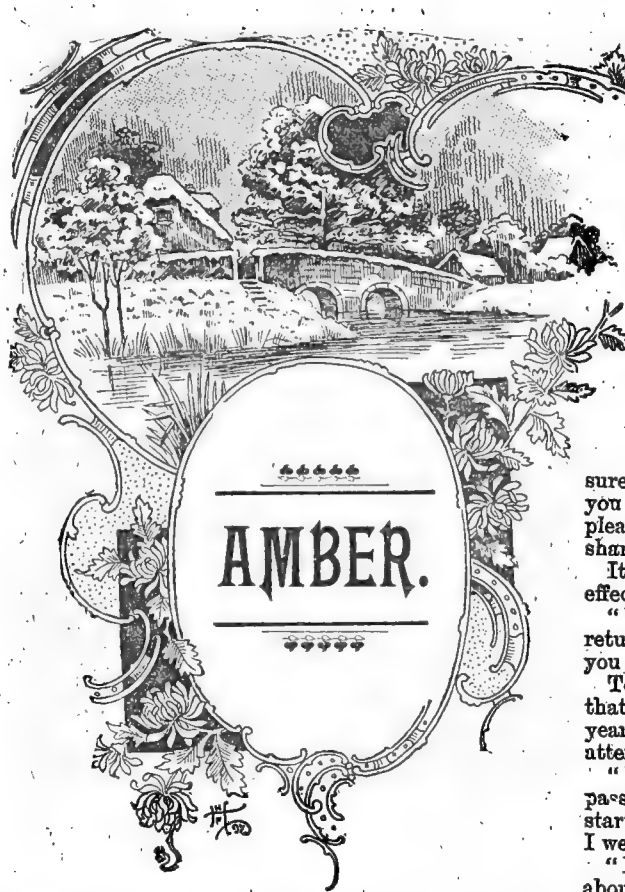

AMBER.

"Another expedition starting out for the North Pole, I see," said I, reading aloud from the evening paper. "Really, these expeditions to the North Pole should be stopped. They do no good, and are a nuisance."

"You don't seem to take much interest in the North Pole," said my companion.

I looked at him. There was a peculiar ring in his voice, a singular scrutiny in his eye. I had not known him long, but circumstances had thrown us together at a friend's house. She had told me that Maurice Connor was a scientific man, a great traveller; that something unpleasant had happened, no one quite knew what, in connection with one of his explorations; but still he was a nice fellow, and very interesting.

"Well, no, I can't say that I do," I responded; "I think, to begin with, that there is no such thing as the North Pole."

"No such thing?" he repeated.

"Of course there is a spot of ice, or snow, or frozen land at that particular point of the earth, but as for there being anything mysterious or wonderful about it, or worth investigating, I simply refuse to believe it."

"And yet the expeditions still continue," he said slowly.

"Why, what's the matter with you? You look so strange in your eyes. Have I said anything I ought not? If you have a pet theory on the subject, kindly forget my remarks."

Though he made no reply, I was fascinated by the peculiar little red flame burning in his eyeball. Suddenly I felt that the man was repressing himself by a violent effort.

I became curious at once, and, unconscious of any reason why I should not, began to question him.

"You have a secret you are afraid you will tell me, haven't you? But I won't tell anyone. What is it about? Not the North Pole, surely? Oh, it is! Why, you haven't been there, have you? Tell me all about it; I should be only too pleased to believe, if I could. Come, be generous; share this secret with me."

It was some time before my importunity had any effect; then, rather unwillingly, he said:

"Well, I will tell you, though you must promise, in return, that you will not repeat what I say until I give you permission."

To this I willingly assented. And then he told me that he had joined an expedition going North some five years before, and, after describing the usual vicissitudes attendant upon these explorations, he continued:

"We were frozen in, as always happens. Weeks passed, and I got tired of inaction. One morning I started off alone, intending to go a short distance. But I went too far and became lost in that awful region.

"I will not describe my sufferings. After wandering about for three days, and when I was nearly done for, I fell in with some Esquimaux.

"They were far from their settlement, and I was glad to go in any direction, for they knew nothing of the ship and could not be induced to help me to find my companions, and I knew that if I did not go with them I should die.

"I was not very strong when first I met with Immu, the Esquimau, his two sons and their sledge with five dogs; but after being with them a few days, a new feeling came into my blood. I was so delighted at my rescue that I gained new strength, and prepared for some interesting experiences.

"I saw that Immu was making his way due North, and came to the conclusion he belonged to the extreme Northern tribes. Of course, I was consumed with curiosity to know everything about our route. At last, one day, when it was fearfully stormy, travelling became very bad, and Immu decided to build a snow hut and remain in its shelter till the worst was over.

"I will not stop to tell you the details of our stay. There came a sudden change and lull in the storm, and we decided to move on. It was strange how different the air was. Immu several times shook his head and, with his sons, examined the ground. Later, I discovered what was the matter; the sudden change in temperature had affected what seemed to be the solid earth beneath our feet.

"There were cracks and fissures dimly outlined on the surface as we proceeded. Immu and his sons held a

conference; but we could do nothing, it seemed. We could neither push forward or go back. A seal thrust out his head, and that, for the moment, made us forget all else until we had him skinned and packed for provision for the future.

"It is needless to say we found we were on an ice-floe, and with nothing to do but to accept the situation. The weather became warmer, and Immu and his sons shook their heads ominously. I had not mastered their dialect yet, but made out that some misfortune was awaiting us.

"It bothered me very little. If this meant death, I was no worse off than I had been; and if not death, there was adventure before me, which was just suited to my frame of mind. I might be on the verge of a great discovery; anything was possible in these frigid regions.

"Those 'warm currents!' I had heard of them always in fanciful legend and story; were they to be proved?

"Well, we floated due North. I don't know what kind of a current it was. It seemed to me it was like a stream on its first course, not quite decided in its direction; it was very slow, making no haste at all. We had provisions for some days, and so had no immediate fears.

"Then, one day, came an unusual sight: a flock of geese, far overhead, with their familiar cry. That, too, I had heard of. Immu was greatly excited, and talked with his sons, still predicting misfortune. I hardly knew how it was, but the change of weather had affected us all very much, we were oppressed and demoralised. Even the sledge dogs felt the influence and howled incessantly.

"I don't know whether it was the result of fever, but I certainly lost my head for several days. When I came to, I found myself on a pleasant green shore, Immu was standing near, in a dazed state, with two of his dogs, but naught did I see of his sons. A magnificent aurora was playing over the sky in ribbons of the rainbow, so that at first I had a vague idea that we were both dead and that this was the gate leading into Heaven. I remember that I thought it rather strange that the dogs should be there, too.

"Coming towards us, I saw several figures, and was almost confirmed in my idea of the nearness to the regions above, for they certainly were angelic in appearance.

"'If I were on earth, I should be tempted to call them albinos,' I said to myself.

"They were pinkish white as to skin, and had phenomenal hair, snow-white, wavy, and standing out round the head in a sort of halo about two feet in diameter.

"Their garments were loose and simple, made of oddly woven material, unlike anything I had ever seen. As they came nearer I saw that their eyes were not pink, as I had expected, but were of a topaz colour, giving more strength to the countenance than has the ordinary albino.

"Of course we could not reply to their questions, and one of them produced a curious instrument, one end of which he rested on my head, the other on his own. By some power, which I did not comprehend, he conveyed to me his thoughts in questions, and I replied to them by thought. I suppose it was a 'thought-telephone,' if there is such a thing in creation.

"Very kindly they told me I was welcome, and invited us to partake of their hospitality. I presume I was still light-headed, for I asked something about whether this was the land of the dead or the land of the living, which query my questioner immediately repeated to his two companions, and all three seemed much excited.

"He responded through the thought-telephone, 'Come, let us learn of each other, for there is much to know for us both.'

"Now, I cannot stop for details. I have it all written out, in case I need it. But in telling this to you, I shall condense my experience into as few words as possible.

"We had reached a remarkable part of the earth's surface, as I soon found out. As in some better known northern latitude, next to the great glaciers, grew beautiful forms of green vegetation, almost rankly—trees, plants, and ferns. There was one large citadel, or community-house, in which it seemed, these strange people lived. Their form of government was the community idea elaborated and made practical.

"It took me some time to understand, even faintly, what kind of a land I was in, and what kind of people they were. All of our latest inventions were here realised and applied practically—things which, of course, I can no more explain than I can Tesla's discoveries, for instance.

"You have heard of the loadstone of the North Pole? This was used for a building material for their citadel, which loomed up like an immense tower of Babel. From the seas quantities of jet and amber were washed up, and these materials they had put to a thousand beautifying purposes of which we have never dreamt. The only iron they had was such as was drawn to the shore in old wrecks, many of which I saw cast up on the beach—wrecks from time immemorial. I could go on for hours, telling you of these things in detail; but these are of the least importance, compared with other things which bewildered me, and which were beyond my comprehension then, and are now.

"After being restored to health, Immu and I were taken to a council chamber, and there met what seemed to be a committee, who asked us many questions, and by some kind of a quick process carved the answers on blocks of slate, of which material there was a vast quantity in their land. Naturally I was puzzled by the absence of paper.

"Finally, however, the facts of the case dawned upon me. It was indeed 'a land of the living'—for so seldom did one of these strange people die that everything was contrived and arranged to last a long time. Therefore they had no use for paper. If a thing was too trivial to

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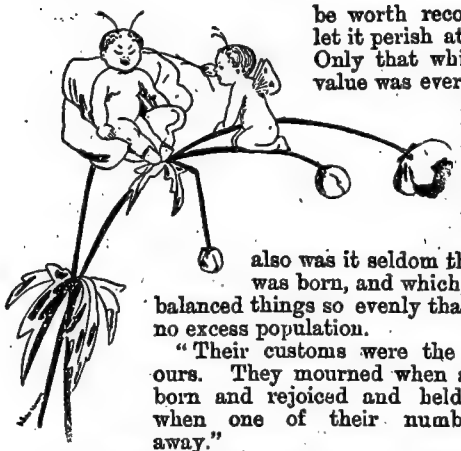

be worth recording they let it perish at inception. Only that which was of value was ever preserved. And if it was seldom that any one of this strange tribe tasted death, so also was it seldom that any one was born, and which, of course, balanced things so evenly that there was no excess population.

"Their customs were the reverse of ours. They mourned when a babe was born and rejoiced and held festivities when one of their number passed away."

As Mr. Connor was telling me this wonderful tale I simply grew more and more fascinated, so that I could not utter a word. But, finally, at this point, I managed to ask a question which it was impossible to withhold longer.

"But, Mr. Connor, did you ever see any of the women? And what were they like?"

"They were just like the men; you could not tell them apart. The men had no beards, and their hair was arranged just the same as that of the women, and they all wore the same sort of garments—a kind of loose princess gown, with clasps of amber and gold down the front. These garments, by the way, were woven of material to serve as non-conductors of electricity; the air there was surcharged with the fluid, and they had learnt how to resist it, as well as how to utilise it. It was the electricity which made their hair stand out so strangely. They used it for a thousand purposes of which we know nothing. Their laboratories were built outside the citadel-house and made a separate city, as it were, they were so numerous.

"One of the first things I noticed in 'the land of the living' was the marvellous colours and designs which they produced upon the skies. It was a constant panorama cast upon no less a canvas than the heavens itself."

"You surely can't mean that these people produce the Aurora Borealis at will?" I asked timidly.

"No, it is merely the result of their interference with the laws of electricity as ordinarily prevailing in that region—it is their joy and delight to bend it to their will and make it their servant. You see, they live so long and waste so little time—one capsule a day, serves them for food. As I said, they waste so little time, that they are masters of the earth."

"Mr. Connor, may I ask a question?"

"Certainly."

"Did you like the women?"

"Very much indeed."

"Were they pretty?"

"Just the same as the men."

"Were they young and charming, then? That's what I meant to ask."

"The youngest was fifty years old, as nearly as I could make out, but that didn't count, for her grandmother looked just as youthful as she did. No one was old there. Everyone was the same age, apparently."

"Was that nice?"

"I thought it delightful."

"Did you admire the fifty-year-old young lady?"

"Yes, I will confess I thought her a wonderful human creation. To wisdom she added unconsciousness of self, which alone is a great charm."

"Did you—did you let her know—know that you liked her?"

"Yes."

"What was her name?"

"I gave her a name I thought suited her better than the one she was known by. I called her 'Amber.'"

"Did she—did she like you, Mr. Connor?"

"Yes."

"Well?"

He looked at me questioningly.

"Did they have marriage laws there? Did they let people marry for love?"

"No, everything was pre-arranged with an idea to longevity, and to the welfare of the community. As soon as they had learnt all they could of the customs which prevailed in my land and that of Immu, they gave me to understand that we were to consider ourselves free to return to the country whence we came.

"I made bold to tell them that I admired their country more than I did my own, and that I was willing to adapt myself to their habits and customs, and, finally, of my love for Amber, whom I wished to marry.

"'Love!' ejaculated the chief councillor of the Albino tribe, 'love, indeed! You cannot talk of such infantile things as that to us! Do you think you can come to us out of the childhood of your race, with all its crudities and pitiful ignorance and darkness of intellect, and with your miserable idea of love, graft on to our splendid race in its full manhood, and help to pull it back to the puny stature of your own?

"'Why, by your own showing, you belong to the ephemera—a race which produces a new generation every thirty-three years. One such specimen as yourself, grafted on to ours, would destroy the race entirely. What compensation have you to offer in return for the destruction of this evolved race?'

"I was dumb. No words came to my aid. And do you wonder? I looked at Amber and saw that her eyes were full of tears. She was in reality about like a girl of twenty of our race.

"The councillor went on: 'There is no knowing how much damage you have already done with these ideas of yours—they are s reading, I see. Oh, my daughter, I am surprised at you, to see you shedding tears for a mere ephemera.'

"'Yes, father,' she said meekly.

"'Bid him good-bye, once and for all time. You will never see him again.'

"In that land they never kiss or touch hands. She simply gave me the thought telephone, one end of which I placed on my head. She thought to

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me and I understood her. 'I will never forget you, beloved, though you may belong to the ephemeral world, it is true. As long as I live—and that will be when you are long turned to clay—still will I dwell in thoughts of you. Often will I, while you live, send you a thought-current, that will tell you that I am thinking of you still with deepest affection. And in the state beyond, perhaps a thousand years from now, we may meet and not be parted.'"

"Was that all?" I asked.

"That night Immu and I and the remaining dog (for one had died in the meantime) were placed on a curious raft with an electrical contrivance for the motive power, and taken away from the strange 'Land of the Living' and the Albino Tribe there dwelling. I presume there was something soporific in the capsules they gave us for food, for both Immu and I were unconscious of ourselves and our whereabouts until we awoke on a shore bleak and sombre.

"Immu seemed to get his bearings in a few hours, however, and we took a line of march which, after several days, led us to familiar ground It was in the direction of the old settlement made by the men of our expedition, whom I had forgotten utterly. But with the remembrance came back looking—I felt I did indeed belong to the ephemera.

"I was pretty well played out with the change of climate, coming back again to the cool so suddenly, and at sight of a shadowy form in the distance, gave out completely.

"It was a party who were making an excursion over the ice. They carried me into a hut, and from there into the ship, the last one taken on board. A roughly-made monument marked the graves of the less fortunate ones who perished in that dismal solitude.

"I had a long illness, in which they said I raved of strange things. Immu, who was brought along with me, nursed me through it faithfully. And when I returned to reason he corroborated the strange experience I had had as well as his limited knowledge of our language would permit. He has since returned to his own land again. The story of the return of the expedition contained nothing remarkable."

"What a strange story," I said meditatively. "I don't wonder expeditions are continuing to go towards the North Pole. But, Mr. Connor, do you really think that love is such a childish thing, and a mark of ignorance? Because, in spite of all that the Albino councillor said, I think that Amber's love for you is its own compensation for everything. Isn't it?"

"Yes."

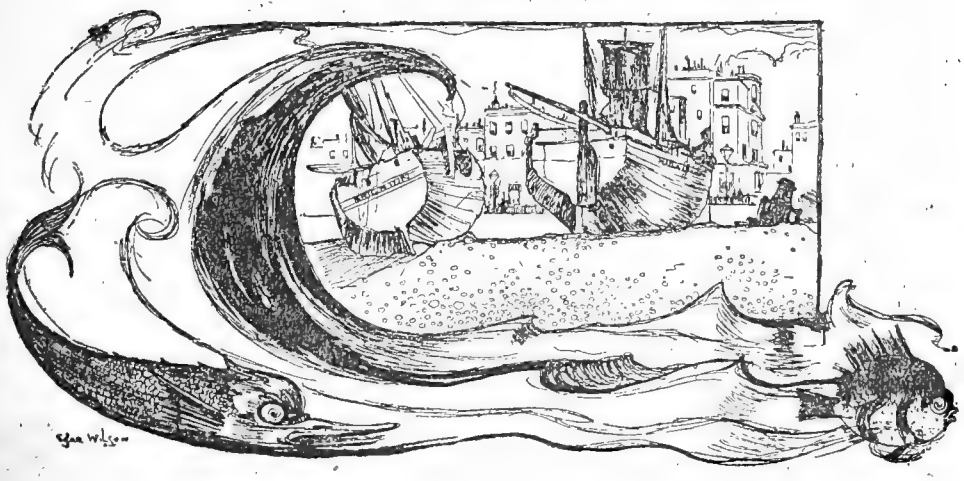
"And shall you wait a thousand years for her?"

"No."

"Oh, Mr. Connor, why not?"

"Because I am, in reality, only an ephemera."

GUY BEAUMONT.



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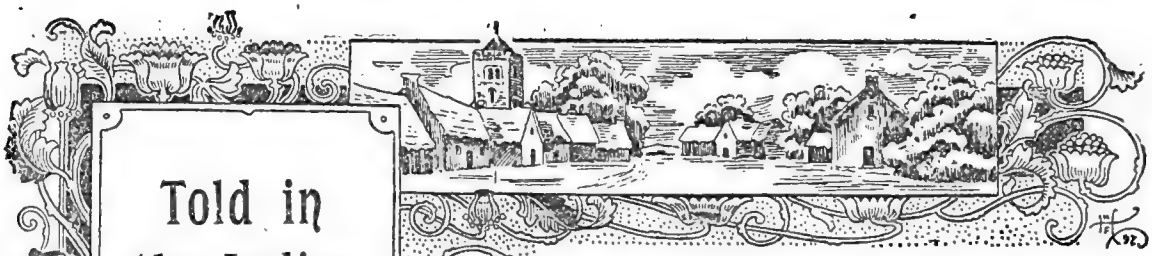

Told in the Indian Bazaar.

By H. HUNTER.

No. 5.—THE ORIGIN OF RUBIES.

In the seventeenth year of the Emperor Shalivahna, the Royal City of Ilapur was plunged suddenly into mourning. The Princess Vasanti had been carried off by a demon. In three days she was to have been married. The Maharajah of Madanpur, to whom the Princess had been betrothed, had sent swift messengers before him to announce his approach.

On the following day, he was to make his entry into the city. But, alas, for the vanity of human wishes. He found Ilapur clothed in sackcloth and sitting in ashes.

One morning the Princess Vasanti, accompanied by her maidens and attendants, had gone as usual to bathe in the Laughing Light—a beautiful tank on the edge of the tree-jungle—and had vanished in a manner most mysterious and alarming.

Few facts were forthcoming, but such as there were pointed unmistakably to the darkest agency. In what other way indeed, could the disappearance of the Princess be accounted for.

The tank, which the giant Mahisha had excavated in a single night at the bidding of Indra, Lord of the Lower Firmament, was a favourite bathing place with the ladies of the Palace.

It was the Princess Vasanti herself who had named it the Laughing Light; because, as she explained it, the water always thrilled with pleasure under the warm kisses of the ardent sun, while it tried with poor success to hide its smiling features beneath the balmy branches and graceful Llianas which overhung it.

On the fateful morning, the birds sang their sweetest, the monkeys in the tamala trees swung themselves sportively from the lowest limbs to the topmost twigs, and rained down green leaf and purple blossom upon the passers below; black bramra bees buzzed and soft breezes blew, filling the air with pleasant sounds and delicious fragrance.

Everything in nature rejoiced; and the young Princess, whose heart was brimming over with happiness at the thought of her fast approaching marriage with the Maharajah, laughed and chattered with the gaiety of youth as the procession of palanquins wound itself along.

Never had she seemed so full of life and health and spirits as at this time; when the bow was bent and the shaft was drawn.

Learn from this, O ye blind, to expect nothing from Fortune, who ever smiles her sweetest when she is meditating the foulest treachery. Be wise, tempt not the future, and put no trust in the promises of the morning. The man who reckons the blessings of the day before the sun has gone down, is likely to repent of his folly at night.

After they tired of pelting each other with the lovely blossoms of the lotus and the rich crimson flowers of the asokas, the girls descended the steps of the tank and entered the water.

They flung the purifying element over each other in merry sport, they shook it in glittering showers from their shining locks, they made a scoop of their hollowed hands and solemnly poured it over one anothers' pretty heads.

For awhile the Princess watched her companions splashing about in the clear cool depths of the silvery stream; then bidding her maidens remain behind, Vasanti herself went to a mango grove hard by to perform the rites of purification and prayer.

It had been the custom of the Princess whenever she came to bathe in the tank, always to retire to the grove for meditation and worship before returning to the city.

So there was nothing to remark in the request she made to her maidens.

As she did not appear, however, at the usual time, her attendants, who thought it might be merely a test of their fidelity, went in search of her.

Up and down they wandered, looking everywhere for traces of their royal mistress, but finding none.

They scoured every green alley, peeped behind every bush, stared into every fig-tree—not a sign of the Princess was anywhere to be seen. What could it mean?

Something too dreadful for utterance. Speech was arrested on their lips.

They wove flower-spells of the jasmine and the lotus; they called upon Krishna of the woods and forests. It was to no purpose. They looked into each other's faces, and saw only terror and dismay reflected from every countenance.

The Princess had vanished. Nothing was certain but that—and that, alas! was too certain to admit room for the smallest doubt.

The maidens returned to the city weeping and throwing dust upon their heads.

The Emperor listened in profound silence while the

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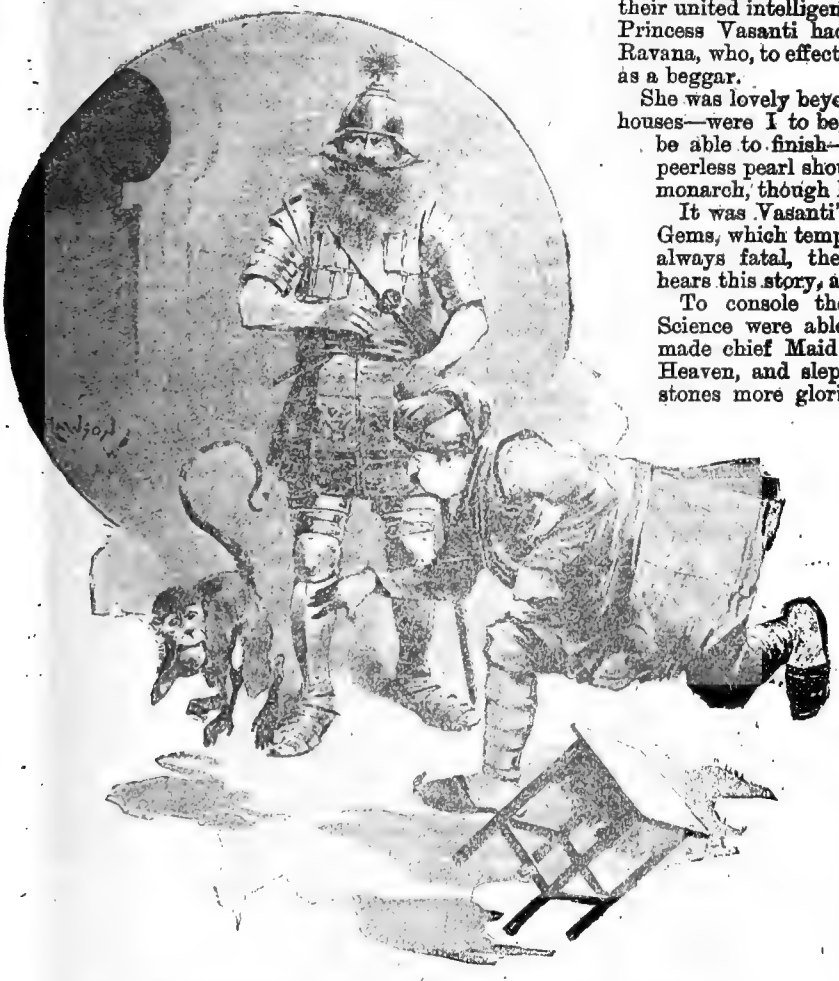
Grand Chamberlain told the story. Then everyone waited, scarce daring even to breathe.

"Clearly," said the Emperor at last, after taking time to consider, "it is the work of some malevolent Being, jealous of human happiness."

The jungle swarmed with unclean creatures, Nagas and Bhutas, servants of the Servant of Darkness. Yet the day was so bright and fair, the mango grove so far from the jungle and so close to the tank where the Laughing Light was always running—and everybody knows that there is virtue enough in running water to scare away the boldest imp that ever came out of Naglok*—that the Emperor was sorely puzzled to decide whether Vasanti had been taken to the realms below, or carried to the meads above.



The Chamberlain made a grab at the ring-tailed favourite.

To satisfy his scruples and set the matter at rest, he referred the question to the Nine Gems of Science, who were the ornament of the Court.

They laboured on it till noon, and were allowed only half the usual time for bathing, eating, sleeping, and worship, so anxious was the Emperor to hear their opinion. At 2 p.m. they resumed their labours, which lasted till twilight; and after a short interval for rest they returned to them again till midnight, when the result of their deliberations was communicated to the Emperor on a double sheet of flower-scented rice paper.

After applying to the question the whole force of their united intelligence, the Gems discovered that the Princess Vasanti had been carried off by the demon Ravana, who, to effect his purpose, had disguised himself as a beggar.

She was lovely beyond any woman who lives in kings' houses—were I to begin to describe her, I should never be able to finish—and he was jealous that such a peerless pearl should become the wife of any earthly monarch, though he were a son of Indra himself.

It was Vasanti's exceeding great beauty, said the Gems, which tempted the demon. Alas! excess is always fatal, therefore, be wise, O mortal! who hears this story, and seek no more than is sufficient.

To console the Emperor, the Nine Gems of Science were able to add that Vasanti had been made chief Maid of Honour to Indrani, Queen of Heaven, and slept on a bed of gold and precious stones more glorious than the meridian sun; and that when the Maharajah should ask for her saying:

"Give me my wife;" he was to give him a green mango which a blind beggar would bring from the grove by the water tank, called the Laughing Light, and say:

"Great King, the gods would not permit so much beauty and virtue to be wasted on a mortal. They have taken her for themselves; but to you she has sent this mango. Cherish it as a gift more precious than the half of thy kingdom."

Now it happened that in the cool of the day there came to the water tank by the mango grove, three brothers, Shridat, Bhowat and Vidhat; and of these Shridat was blind, Bhowat was deaf and Vidhat was unable to speak a word. They were the victims of Lakshichara,* who is ever dogging the feet of the children of men; and for daily sustenance depended on the alms of the charitable.

Had they been suffering by the Will of Heaven,† of course it would have been impious to relieve them; but the poor fellows had been overtaken by ill-luck upon "the road," and the wealthy and benevolent saw in them only so many steps to a seat under the Celestial tree in Indra's Paradise, where the wish of every virtuous soul is gratified sooner than it can be expressed; so there was always honey and butter and rice for to-day; and as Shridat would often observe, who knows what may happen to-morrow.

He had just delivered himself for the thousand-and-first time of this excellent observation, and was sitting down with Bhowat and Vidhat to the frugal repast which formed their evening meal; when, a stranger, approaching, asked permisson to put his hand in the dish.

* The Infernal Regions.

* Bad luck. † Afflicted from birth.

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"Draw near, friend," said Shridat, who was the eldest, "by the blessing of God, what was prepared for three will suffice for four. The sun shines on rich and poor alike, and shall he who hath food refuse a share to him who hath none? Nay, eat thy fill, friend, and be satisfied."

Thus adjured, the stranger sat down and fell to. But while all ate heartily the mess in the dish seemed never to grow any the less for all that was taken out of it.

At last, having appeased his hunger, the stranger inquired whither they were travelling; and Shridat replied, to the royal city of Ilapur, where the Princess Vasanti was to be married in three days to the Maharajah of Madanpur.

"We have heard of nothing else," said he, "all the way from Shumshushabad. It is the talk of every well-side—the gossip of every village street. The charity and magnificence of the Emperor is in every man's mouth. Surely, then, we may hope to come in for a share when so many good things are going."

The stranger pondered a while.

"It would be a thousand pities," said he at length, "if such worthy persons should suffer disappointment. Take this mango, my friend, demand of the doorkeeper an audience of the Emperor. Make thy obeisance before him, and he will grant thee permission to speak. Then shalt thou say these words:

"'O Pearl of Equity, and Protector of the Poor, I bring thee the fruit which the learned Pundits wot of, from the grove by the Laughing Light. Baksheesh! my lord Emperor, baksheesh!'"

With this the stranger thrust into Shridat's palm a large green mango, and rising quickly was soon lost to sight.

Now, as we all know, the gods have power to grant or withhold as seemeth unto them good; and by favour of Kartikaya,* whose votaries they were, the disabilities under which the brothers laboured in public were removed in private. At these times Shridat regained the use of his eyes, Bhowat recovered his hearing, and Vidhat was able to use his tongue. Only the dispensation they enjoyed by the goodwill of Kartikaya they kept to themselves.

"Brothers," said Shridat, as soon as they were alone, "who knows what may happen to-morrow?" And, Bhowat, smiling, answered:

"To-morrow?"

And Vidhat, who was unaccustomed to speaking, repeated:

"To-morrow!"

Then Shridat put the mango in his turban and they lay down to sleep.

At the hour appointed for giving audience next day, Shridat, standing before the Emperor, made his obeisance, and in all things did as the stranger had commanded. Then withdrawing the mango from his turban he laid it at the Emperor's feet.

"Stretch forth thy hands," said the Emperor.

Whereupon Shridat held out his palms.

"You brought them here empty," said his Majesty, "take them away filled," and he poured into them so many gold pieces that numbers fell to the floor.

At this moment, the shouting of the people outside announced the arrival of the Maharajah. He was received by the Emperor in person and conducted to a chair of State in the Hall of Private Audience. Here the Emperor explained to him exactly how the matter stood, ending his recital by presenting his Highness with the mango.

The Maharajah was cut to the heart, but concealing his grief he accepted the mango with "dignified humility," said the Court Chronicler. However that may be, we know that he accepted it; but no sooner was it in his hands than Ratipati, the Emperor's favourite monkey, tore it from his grasp and ran off with it.

"A gift more precious than the half of my kingdom!" cried the Maharajah. The Chamberlain made a grab at the ring-tailed favourite: alas! he was too late to save the mango. The monkey's teeth had pierced the skin, whereupon there dropped to the ground a jewel of such size, water and colour that none had ever seen the like before.

Loud were the expressions of wonder. All the jewellers in the city were sent for to say what might be the name and value of the wonderful red stone, whose colour, quality, and beauty surpassed everything in the way of jewels that the lapidaries had ever handled.

"To put a value upon such an inestimable gem was to ask them to attempt the impossible. The whole earth did not contain its like"—and then, from a shabby old crow which had flown into the chamber unperceived, came a hoarse cackle.

"Go, look in the mango grove by the Laughing Light," said he. "Find the tree which stands in the middle of the ninth row. Every mango which hangs on its branches contains a drop of the blood, which, in her earthly life, animated the body of the Princess Vasanti—an elixir so pure and precious, that Sarvitri, the Giver of Life, would not permit of its being contaminated by the common fluid found in the veins of Rajahs, Ameers, and others of the baser sort. And to preserve it for ever in all its pristine purity, Kama Deva* was commanded to form of each separate drop a flaming jewel; and these he imprisoned in the fruit of the tree, beneath which Vasanti was met by the messenger who bore her to Indra's Paradise.

"The stone in the mango, Great King! is a ruby! which the Princess has sent to the Maharajah as a consolation for the loss of herself."

Then he spread his wings and flew away.

Next morning, the Emperor, accompanied by the Maharajah, went to the mango grove by the Laughing Light to see if the crow had spoken the truth. But a great wind had risen in the night and behold all the trees were bare.

Since then rubies have only been found at those places where the wind carried the mangoes.

* The Patron of Rascals.

* The Hindoo Cupid.

Mr. HEADON HILL,

Author of "*The Zone of Fire*," "*Guilty Gold*," etc., has written a Short Serial Story for *PEARSON'S WEEKLY*, entitled:

The Strange Case of "The Tintern Abbey."

It commences in *P. W.* published on Saturday, July 9th, and it will last only till the August Bank Holiday Number, in which a Grand New serial, entitled:

"LOST—A MILLIONAIRE!"

by a new writer, will commence.

The Strange Case of "The Tintern Abbey" is, therefore, quite short, and those who are not in the habit of reading *P. W.* regularly will be able to enjoy this story without the necessity of buying the paper every week for any great length of time.

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A Shattered Idol.

A RUSH of footsteps, gay snatches of song, an impetuous throwing open of the door, and she swept in, radiant with health, glowing from exercise and bringing with her a breeze as of frosty violets.

A man sitting by the window turned with a smile to greet her. His eyes were very bright, there was a brilliant flush high on the cheek bones, and his face wore that hectic beauty which, as if for a slight compensation, consumption stamps on its victims.

His eyes swept lovingly over her, resting caressingly on her face, on the muff that hid her hands, the dark cloth gown with its hidden silken *frou-frou*, the high-arched, slender foot just showing beneath—lovingly, lingeringly, yet with a trace of sadness as if loath to give up so much beauty. He stretched out his hand to her and she kissed him tenderly.

"Did I stay too long? Have you been lonely, Herbert, dear? The air was so cold and crisp, and the day so beautiful, I am afraid I almost forgot you were shut in here alone. What a shame the first touch of winter should make you one of the 'shut in!' And I—I am so strong, so happy! Why can I not share my health with you, my husband—my dear, dear husband?"

She sank to her knees beside him and rested her soft, cool cheek on his, and he kissed her dark hair and was happy.

* * * * *

Only twenty-four hours had passed and all the world was changed! He had sat again by the window watching for the carriage, wondering at his wife's delay, when there came a loud shouting, the clatter of horses' hoofs on the asphalt, and an eager, morbid, ever-growing throng surged on the scene. The ambulance clattered by, the crowd went on, and the noises grew faint in the distance.

Presently he saw the ambulance coming up the street.

Why did his heart grow cold and his hands tremble? Why did the hateful thing come slowly nearer and nearer? Why—why do they stop at this door?

Staggering, with pallid face, between two burly, tender-faced men came the coachman. Only the coachman! Oh, thank Heaven! And the relief was so great he laughed.

But the coachman only came to the foot of the steps, and shivering and sobbing, hid his face in his bleeding hands. Then he saw a form stretched on the ambulance. The watching man at the window stood paralysed, his face growing greyer and greyer as the ambulance was borne past, the weeping coachman and up the steps of his own house.

After that everything was a dream. There were reporters and a misty figure of a lugubrious-faced undertaker. There was his wife's maid, who had to be taken away because of her incessant noisy weeping, and the kindly-meaning, but intrusive neighbours.

Then her mother came—her mother with the same tender eyes—and took him in her arms. He rested his head upon her sorrowing breast, but he could not weep.

After a while she left him, for no one but herself might touch that beautiful, idolised form.

In a few hours she came for him and led him to her room, and bade him look on the dear face now so white and inscrutable in death. He knelt beside the bed, staring dumbly, and she left him there with his dead.

The next day came cards and notes which he would not look at, and hundreds of flowers which made the air sickening sweet.

The hours passed, and then someone came for him. He looked again on the still face beneath the violet-laden cover. He kissed her brow with lips which were as icy-cold as were the dear dead lips, but did not quiver; and his burning, strained eyes felt no welcome moisture, for his was that awful grief which is too great for tears.

They took her away, and kind friends sat and talked to him, and he wished they would go away.

At last he was alone, and he paced the floor and moaned and beat his breast, and tried in vain to weep. When his tearless grief had spent itself he went to her little sitting room. Her mother came, and they sat alone in the early winter twilight. A little fire burnt merrily in the grate, and her favourite perfume still floated in the air. The mother had sobbed her heart out, and now they both sat quietly before the fire and talked in low, sad tones of the dear dead one.

"She was so beautiful," the mother sighed. "When she was a little, chubby baby, clinging round my neck, her limbs were just as perfect as they are now, and her eyes as black and deeply fringed. And as she grew her mind grew, too, and expanded. Ah, Herbert, even you never knew the beautiful thoughts she had! And then you came and took her away. Oh, how grudgingly I gave her to you! But she loved you so much that I was silenced. I could deny her nothing. At any rate there was the consolation that you were her first love. My little Emily, she went to you so sweet, so pure——"

"And," he said, "she was sweet and good to her last day. These last few months I have not been able to

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share in her gaieties, but she always had a thought and a tender word for me. No man's name, I know, except my own, has ever crossed her lips lovingly."

There was a knock at the door, the postman's knock, and in a moment the maid entered, bringing a silver tray with three letters.

He looked at them and groaned.

"All for her! There are some friends still who do not know. Ah, what a little time for such a change!"

He turned the letters over but seemed unable to open them.

"Will you open them, mother? I cannot."

She seated herself beneath the rose-shaded lamp, and, taking the letters, slit the envelopes.

The first was an invitation and, after glancing over it, she dropped it in her lap. The next was a sweetly-written note from an invalid friend with thanks for flowers. She opened the third. It read:

My Darling Emily.—Why did you not come? I have been sitting here in my room for hours since the time agreed upon—hours—*days* they seem to me, my sweet—and now I have given you up. What has happened? Is he worse? I had almost said I hope so, but that would shock you, my sensitive, beautiful darling. Ah, how I envy him! I could wish myself dying, as he surely is, to have you all my own.

I shall have to leave to-night for a day or two. I cannot see you or hear from you for at least three whole days—an eternity, my own. Are you not sorry now you did not come?

You have told me I must not write you, but I think you overrate the danger. I will not do it again, but to-night I so long to see you I cannot help it.

Good-night, my only love, good-night.—Your Ned.

She read it through, then through again, with staring eyes, her face growing rigid and ghastly. She crushed the paper in her hand and held it tight, staring at him with furtive, hunted eyes. He aroused himself from a deep reverie and met her glance, then sprang quickly to her side.

"What is it, mother? Are you ill? You are so frightfully pale! Was it something in the letters?"

She collected herself with an effort. Her eyes were dull, but her voice was low and even.

"Nothing, Herbert, nothing. I didn't feel quite well; the strain of the day—the sorrow! The letters, did you say, the letters? Oh, yes, only these two short notes."

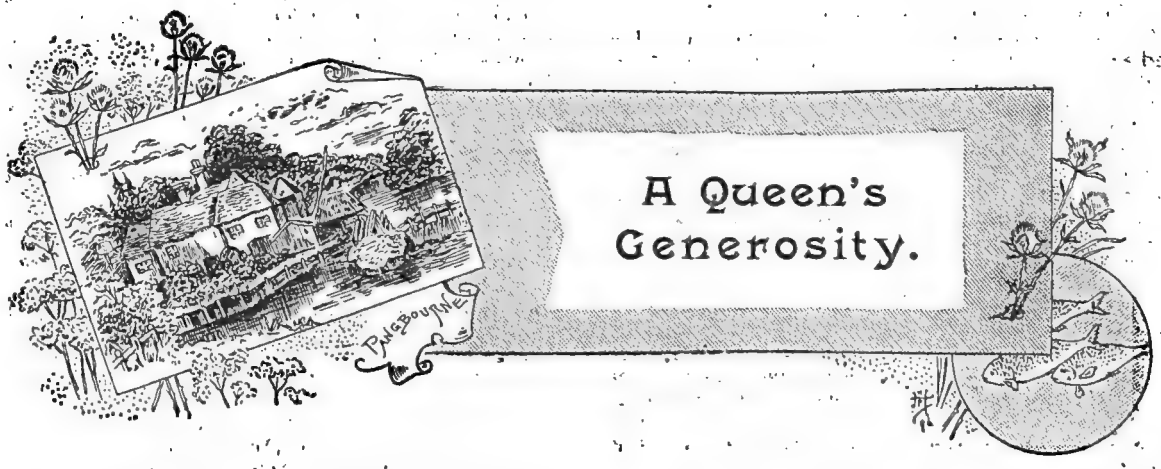
As he read them she walked to the fire and, standing with her back to him, dropped a crumpled ball of paper into it. She watched it till it was consumed, then turning to the window, raised it and stood there breathing deeply.

"Does the room seem warm?" he said. "I thought it rather chilly."

"No, it was only a momentary faintness. I am quite well now."

She shut the window and resumed her seat, but with her back to the light, and there, in the little room, which was Emily's, they sat far into the night, the broken-hearted husband talking tenderly of her, and the broken-hearted mother listening.

Julian King.



Years and years ago, in a certain country, a certain queen reigned supreme; she was a cold, haughty, imperious woman, ruling absolutely.

The country prospered during her reign, but, although the people acknowledged her power, she was held in great awe. After all, she was but human, and had a heart, which once, at least, was touched.

The man on whom she secretly lavished much affection treated her with all homage due to her rank, but she was uncertain whether he really cared for her for herself alone.

One day this queen heard of a palmist, who had acquired much fame for his accurate telling of the future and people's character from the lines in their palms. She would not lower herself by going to him unknown, but would have him come to her in the midst of her court.

The palmist was notified of the great honour conferred upon him, and an evening was appointed for him to visit her majesty. Punctually to the minute he presented himself at the palace.

He was not much over thirty, pleasing to look at, and carried himself with dignity. In his eyes one might have observed a troubled look. He always told the exact truth of what he saw, and he realised that the queen had been accustomed to flattery all her life.

All the lords and ladies of the court had been bidden to hear the future of their queen. She thought it would

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add one more drop of complacent self-esteem to have all the people hear from the lips of this celebrated palmist how great and virtuous she was.

He was, therefore, conducted to the throne, where he bowed low before her. She thus addressed him:

"We have called you hither, sir, that you may read our palm and tell us of the things you see therein."

The palmist bowed a second time, and replied:

"Your majesty overpowers me with your gracious condescension, but think you it is right that I should presume to predict the future of one so illustrious as yourself? Power and greatness are yours. We all see it and feel it. Is it not enough for you to know?"

The queen's eyes flashed.

"Is it for this you have come—to invent excuses, methinks, to hide your ignorance? Proceed, sir, to look at our hand. We would know what deceits are being practised on our people!"

An answering flash came from the palmist's eyes.

"As you will, so be it, your majesty," he replied, sinking on one knee in front of the throne.

Then he placed a cushion for her to rest her hands upon, and, when all was in readiness, said to her in a low voice: "Is it the queen's wish that all this assembled court shall hear what I have to say, and that will be what I see in these royal palms?"

She smiled slightly at the last words and nodded assent.

"I would 'twere otherwise! But to begin;" and the palmist continued: "You will gain your desires, your majesty, no matter what be the cost. You are selfish and could be cruel on occasions. Your aim is power, and in this life you will gain it to the fullest degree. Men's minds you will control, their hearts never. In fact, through the line of heart a——"

"Enough, sir, we see how paltry is your knowledge, and we are grateful to you for your opinion of us."

The queen snatched her hand away and stood quivering with passion before him.

"Now, sir," she went on, "your reward you shall receive. At noon to-morrow you shall die on the gallows. Have you aught to say, palmist?"

"What you have said is not strange to me, your majesty. I foresaw by my own hand that at this time I was to die by the cruel injustice of one far above me in this world," he replied.

"'Tis well, sir, you are prepared, and, fortunately, in the next world people will be spared your arts." Thus spoke the queen.

During this time the courtiers and ladies had remained motionless, so astonished were they at the scene going on before them. There was a slight remonstrance from a few of the boldest who dared to venture to reason with the queen. She waved them all aside and said:

"The court is dismissed; take the man away and see that my orders are obeyed."

Then she stepped from the throne, and swept from the room, looking at no one.

* * * * *

The palmist was taken to a prison cell. There, that night, a touching scene took place. He had requested one last interview with his wife. They had been married but six months, and she was a beautiful girl. How nobly now she bore her part.

"Is there no hope?" she whispered; "no line to save that awful break in your line of life and of fate?"

"None," he said. "She may repent, but it will be too late to save me."

He took her hands in his, and, looking into her eyes, went on: "My wish is that you continue my work. You know much already, and from my books you will soon know all. You and I are the only ones to keep this great science from falling into the hands of gypsies and mere fortune-tellers. I have given my life for it."

"And I will do no less," said his wife, interrupting him.

The last few words of parting were spoken between them, too sacred for anyone to hear, and then she was led away.

When the Queen reached her private apartment she walked rapidly up and down, trying to calm herself. She spoke half aloud.

"He told me more truth than I cared to hear, and before the courtiers and ladies, for that he shall be punished; but not as he now thinks. Only frightened, but not hanged. I can't condemn the first man who has spoken truly to me for many months. At a quarter of an hour before noon a reprieve shall be sent to him at the market place. He shall then see that some, at least, of his predictions are false. I can be generous when I please."

The morning sun streamed in through a narrow opening into a prison cell, resting gently on the bowed head of a man. It streamed in through a lattice window of a dilapidated house, touching a woman sobbing as if her heart would break. It played about a palace, and, as a shade was drawn, crept into a royal dwelling, but was as quickly excluded. Perchance it heard a voice say: "I would sleep longer, let no light in."

So it scampered away, and danced merrily up and down a gallows erected in the square.

The hours slipped by. At length the shutters in the royal abode were thrown open. When the queen was ready to receive once more, she called for her special messenger. As he entered, he made the customary salutation, but his face was white, and he looked at the queen as no loving subject should look. She handed a paper to him, and said:

"It acks but a quarter to the noon hour. Take this paper to the square where the gallows is erected, and read it to the palmist before the people. It is his rightful reward—a reprieve. Nay, more, give him this purse of gold, and say to him—before all the multitude remember—'Behold a queen's generosity.'"

"Too late, your majesty," the messenger replied; "your clock is twenty minutes slow. I have but just come from the square. The palmist is dead."

VIOLET MILLES.

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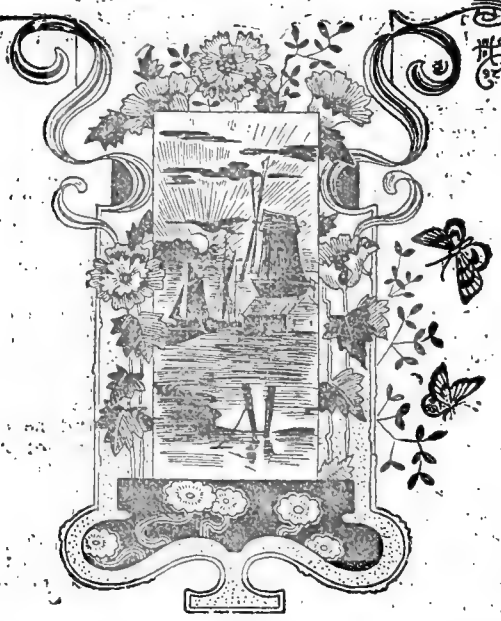
The Mystery of the Missing Liner.



At ten o'clock on the morning of March 14th, 1903, the Anglo-American liner, the *Oklahoma*, left Southampton on her regular trip to New York.

The fact of her departure, ordinarily of merely local interest, was telegraphed all over Europe and America, for there was a significance attached to this particular trip such as had never before marked the sailing of an ocean steamship from these shores.

It was not because the great vessel numbered among her crowd of passengers a well-known duke and his young bride that her sailing was heralded by such a blowing of trumpets, nor because she had also upon her lists the names of the British Ambassador to the United States, returning after a brief leave of absence, and a score of other illustrious personages whose names were household words.

The presence of these notables was merely incidental. What made this trip of the *Oklahoma* an event of international interest was the fact that the *Oklahoma* was taking to the shores of Uncle Sam the largest lump amount of gold ever shipped upon a single vessel within the memory of man.

Not even in the memorable gold exporting year of 1893, ten years previous, had any such sum as this been sent abroad at one time.

It was not the usual paltry quarter or half million sterling that she was carrying away in her great strong room of steel and teak wood, but ten million pounds' worth of shining bars and money, hastily called across the ocean because of the adverse "balance of trade" and the urgent need of money on the part of the American Government, both consequent upon the United States' great scheme of absorbing all the South American Republics and her conflicts and bargains with them and Spain and Portugal during the past five years.

The mere insurance premium on this vast sum was in itself a comfortable fortune. Business men wondered why such a large amount was intrusted to one steamer. Suppose she should collide in the fog and sink, as one great ship had done only five weeks before—what would become of the insurance companies then?

Suppose some daring Napoleon of crime should hatch a startling conspiracy to seize the steamer, intimidate the crew and passengers and possess himself of the huge treasure? It would be a stake well worth running great risks, thought some of the police officials, as they read the headlines in the evening papers.

The *Oklahoma* was a fast steamer. Her five hundred feet of length and her twelve thousand tons of displacement were made light work of by the great, clanking, triple-expansion engines when their combined force of fifteen thousand horse-power was brought to bear upon her twin screws. Under ordinary conditions she ought to have made port on the other side in time to let her passengers eat late dinner on the fifth day. There was nasty weather in mid-ocean, however, and so her failure to reach her destination on the sixth and even the seventh day was not particularly remarked.

The public had been busy with other weighty matters in the interim, and the departure of this modern argosy with her precious freight had almost passed into history. For history in the year 1903 was anything that had happened a week ago—a day—if it was not of overwhelming importance.

If the big ship's arrival had been cabled on the eighth day, or even early on the ninth, it would still have found the public in a comparatively calm state of mind, for the mid-Atlantic storm would naturally account for a multitude of lost hours; but when the ninth changed into the tenth, and the tenth into the eleventh and twelfth, with no tidings whatever of the tardy steamer, surprise grew into anxiety and into an international sensation.

Of course all sorts of plausable theories were advanced by the steamship agents, newspapers, and other oracles, including that of the inevitable broken shaft; and these might have sufficed for a day longer, had it not been for another and much more startling theory that suddenly came to the surface, and threw two continents into a fever of trepidation and suspense.

It was the following announcement in a leading London paper that roused excitement to a white heat:

"A new and most astounding phase has come over the case of the mysteriously missing *Oklahoma*. It has just become known to the police that James Lang, known as 'Gentleman Jim,' the noted criminal and forger, whose ten years' sentence expired only a few weeks ago, was in the city several days previous to the sailing of the *Oklahoma*, and went with her as a

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passenger under an assumed name. Even at that very time detectives were looking for him, as there was reason to believe that he had some great scheme on hand. One of those clever people whom nothing ever escapes had seen him go on board almost at the last minute, and gave an accurate description of his personal appearance which was evidently but slightly disguised.

"Lang is probably the only criminal in the country who ever would conceive and try to execute such a stupendous undertaking, and it is something more than suspicion on the part of the police that he has smuggled on board a couple of dozen well-armed desperadoes, who could easily hold the entire crew and passengers in check and make them do their bidding, for a time at least. The idea is so replete with thrilling possibilities that the entire community stands aghast at it."

It is to be noted that the public always stands aghast in such a case as this; but it is more to the point just now to say that the article went on, through a column or more, to describe in minute detail the circumstances attendant upon the departure of "Gentleman Jim," even to the exact size and shape of the bag he had in his hand.

The famous criminal was very boyish in appearance, and one of the last persons in the world whom a chance acquaintance would think of looking up in the "Rogues' Gallery."

The theory and the news acted upon the British Government much like an electric shock, and nearly threw the Foreign Office into a panic; for was not the British plenipotentiary himself a passenger on the ill-fated *Oklahoma*, and possibly at that very hour being butchered in cold blood by a lot of cut-throats?

The thought was too horrible for a moment's endurance, and the result was that within a few hours after the appearance of the paragraphs, one of the fastest and most powerful of Her Majesty's cruisers, quickly followed by a second and a third, hastily steamed from Portsmouth, the three spreading out north, west, and south, like a great marine fan, as they hurried to the rescue of the *Oklahoma* and the British Ambassador.

Meanwhile, three or four American warships were getting up steam for a similar errand, and a small fleet of ocean-going steamers, specially chartered by newspapers to go in search of the absent leviathan, were already out at sea.

Not for years had there been such world-wide interest in an ocean expedition. The newspapers commanded an unheard-of sale, for everybody was on the tiptoe of expectation concerning the fate of the missing steamer, her six hundred passengers, and her ten million pounds' worth of gold.

While the public were thus feverishly awaiting the news, certain discoveries were being made by the police, which tended to confirm their previous suspicions. Four or five other hardened graduates from prison were found to be absent from their accustomed haunts, although they had been seen just before the *Oklahoma* sailed.

These discoveries had the natural effect upon the public mind, and the friends of those on board the steamer began to despair of hearing that even human life had been respected by the piratical band.

Three days passed by after the departure of the search vessels, during which time all incoming steamers reported that they had not found a single trace of the *Oklahoma*, either in the northern or southern route. Vessels from other parts of the world made the same ominous report.

The tension was terrible. The public by this time was convinced beyond reasonable doubt that the robbers had successfully carried out their fiendish plan. But how, and when, and where?

When they opened their newspapers on the morning of the eighteenth day they found the answer to the question, and the greatest marine mystery of centuries was solved.

In the small hours of the night there flashed across the European Continent, and under the dark waters of the Atlantic, this startling message from the representative of the Press Association:

LISBON, April 1st.—"The missing *Oklahoma* is disabled at Fayal, Azores, where she was discovered by the Press Association special expedition. Many of the half-starved crew and passengers are on the verge of insanity. The officers tell a most astounding story of the steamer's exciting and almost fatal adventures.

"On the third night out, the *Oklahoma* suddenly came under some mysterious but irresistible influence, by which she was carried rapidly out of her course towards the south. Every effort was made by the officers to bring the ship back to her course, but the big liner drifted helplessly at the mercy of some powerful current. The compasses were useless, and the wheel no longer exercised the slightest control over the steamer's movements.

"Naturally the anxiety of the officers was in no way diminished, when, on the morning of the next day, another vessel—a low-lying vessel of shining steel—was discovered off the *Oklahoma's* starboard bow, about a mile ahead, but moving in the same direction.

"By careful observations it was discovered that the course of the two steamers was identical. Both were apparently under the same mysterious influence. Instead of sighting a rescuer, the *Oklahoma* had, so it seemed, only discovered another victim of the irresistible current.

"Again and again the *Oklahoma* attempted to signal the companion ship, but the latter made no reply. Close observation revealed that she was built on the whaleback principle, with nothing above deck save ventilators and signal mast, but failed to reveal any sign of human being.

"By afternoon, their continued failure to bring the liner back to her course had so worked upon the minds of her officers, that their anxiety infected the spirits of the passengers, who were now aroused to the real danger that menaced them.

"When the fifth day dawned, with the *Oklahoma* undoubtedly very far out of the regular transatlantic course, the gravity of the situation could no longer be concealed. Distress signals were kept flying, and all possible steam was put on with the idea of overhauling the companion ship and giving or receiving aid. To the amazement of both officers and passengers, however, in spite of every effort, the *Oklahoma* failed to gain a single inch on the other vessel.

"Before they had time to attempt an explanation of this remarkable fact, amazement gave way to consternation. For just a moment a third vessel had appeared on the horizon like a messenger of hope; but no sooner had she been sighted than, with the swiftness of lightning, the mysterious companion craft turned half round and darted away to the south east, with the *Oklahoma* following as helplessly as though she were in tow.

"In that moment the awful truth was revealed. The steel vessel was nothing more or less than a floating magnet, which, by some mysterious power, was dragging

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the great ocean monster hither and thither as easily as a child's magnet draws a toy ship from one side to another of a mimic pond.

"Who was she and what was her motive? Almost before those on board had asked the question, the answer flashed upon them. The ten million pounds worth of gold! Beyond a doubt, it was the capture of this treasure which she was planning to accomplish, either by luring the *Oklahoma* from the regular path of ocean traffic, and looting her and her passengers at leisure, or by compelling her to run aground upon some remote rock or shoal.

"With this revelation a new horror unveiled itself. Equipped as they were only with the supplies of a short trip across the Atlantic, the overwrought minds of many saw starvation looming before them.

"That night not a soul sought his berth. From time to time consultations were held between the chief officers, and many coloured rockets split and blazed their signals of distress incessantly across the sky.

"At length, soon after dawn of the sixth day, orders were given to bank fires and hoist sails in the hope that the *Oklahoma*, as a sailing vessel, might free herself from the awful influence that chained her.

"But the effort was vain. Wind and sail proved as useless as wheel and compass against the fatal power of that mysterious craft which drew the *Oklahoma* after her as irresistibly as though the two vessels were united by an unseen hawser.

"The steamer had now become a scene of indescribable horror. Meanwhile, all the customary routine was disorganised; and frequent prayer meetings were conducted among the more emotional of the passengers.

"Finally, seven days after she had left port, the officers of the big liner made one last desperate effort to offset the magnetic influence of the mysterious 'pirate.'

"The fires were revived in the engine-room, the steam pressure in all the boilers was run up to the blowing-off point; then suddenly the reversing mechanism was applied, and a shudder ran through the great floating city as the twin screws began to back water.

"For a few minutes there ensued a gigantic tug-of-war such as the beholders had never before witnessed. The water astern was lashed into a lather of foam, for a brief moment the triumph of steam over magnetism seemed assured.

"Only for a moment, however, for the cheer that had ascended from the anxious watchers had scarcely died away when, with a mighty crash, a vital section of the overtaxed engines gave way, and followed by a hoarse yell of consternation from the excited engineers and stokers—and both screws were helpless and still.

"With this failure hope was well nigh extinguished, and the *Oklahoma*, with her precious freight and her hundreds of human souls, abandoned all active effort to escape.

"With not a sail of any kind in sight, she passively rolled and plunged southward for seven days after her strange and terrible pilot, from which, to add to the horror of the situation, no human sign had yet been given.

"The supply of rockets was now exhausted, and food was doled out in minute portions, as to members of a shipwrecked crew, in order to husband supplies.

"On the afternoon of the fourteenth day, when the exhausted passengers had reached the verge of distraction, a gleam of hope appeared on the horizon in the shape of a solitary steamer, bearing down from the south-west. A glance through the telescope proved her to be a fast and formidable British cruiser.

"At this news a mighty shudder, half of hope, half of fear, seized the crowd assembled upon the deck. Would the British cruiser come to their assistance, and if so, would she, too, become a victim of the magnetic craft?

"For a moment their fate hung in the balance, then from the hundreds of throats rang out a hoarse cry of joy as the mysterious craft swerved, turned sharply and shot away over the surface of the Atlantic due north.

"The spell was broken. The big liner with her six hundred human souls and ten millions in gold was freed from the power that had for so long held her captive.

"But, crippled as she was by the accident to her machinery, she was unable to proceed unaided, and was taken in tow by the warship, the *Midlothian*, and a day later brought safely into port at Fayal.

"The Press Association steamer is the first to bring the thrilling news. The first officer of the *Oklahoma* and the saloon passengers, including the British Ambassador, accompanied your correspondent to Lisbon. A relief steamer is urgently needed, as the *Oklahoma's* engines are disabled, and she will not be able to proceed for several weeks.

"The passenger thought to be 'Gentleman Jim' Lang proves to be the Duke of Madfordshire, now on his wedding trip with his young bride."

Hardly had the excitement caused by this startling intelligence subsided, when it was once more aroused by the information of the capture, in the act of robbing a jeweller's, of "Gentleman Jim" Lang, and a gang of four other criminals. This was followed by an important telegram from Russia:

St. Petersburg, April 2nd.—The identity of the mysterious craft by which the *Oklahoma* was drawn from her course has been established beyond a doubt.

The vessel is a Hypnotic cruiser, recently completed by a Russian inventor, named Slobodenski, and possessed of an electric apparatus by which any vessel can be brought completely under control.

Whether the Hypnotic cruiser's outrage on the *Oklahoma* was merely a trial of power, or whether plunder was intended, can only be surmised. But experts say that this marvellous new invention will revolutionise naval warfare, and necessitate the passage of stringent laws to cover a crime for which at present no penalty exists.

S. K. M.

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A FIERY ORDEAL.

Tessie and I were friends. We had always been friends since—well, since we wore dresses together. That was when I was five and she was four. We were, from that time, always together.

We were chums. She went everywhere I went and did everything I did, and, as we grew up to boyhood and girlhood, we were inseparable.

She was strong and athletic, but of a slender build; could drive, row and swim as well I could; and had a complexion well browned by a long and intimate acquaintance with the Australian sunlight. A brave girl too.

Then Tess went to a boarding school, and came back at the end of three years somewhat different in appearance, but at heart the same dear old Tess as ever.

Now, although my girl friend and I had known each other so long and so intimately, yet we had never fallen in love with each other.

I am positive of this, because when I got soft on Jennie Bingham, and lavished all my money on flowers for her, Tess only laughed.

But now I was twenty and Tessie nineteen, and somehow, as I took the shapely little hand she offered me to welcome her back, after those three years at school, somehow it came to me suddenly that Tess was a beautiful girl, and that her eyes were bewitching. And there came into my heart a strange, uncomfortable feeling.

Suppose someone should take it into his head to fall in love with Tessie and marry her?

The summer I wish particularly to tell you of, the one following Tessie's return from school, my people and her people decided to spend the hot season at a little mountain hamlet with an unpronounceable name—a lot of "ongs" and "wongs" about it.

It was a little place in the bush, with about one hundred inhabitants. It was ten miles from the nearest railway—and that only a branch line, and about seven miles out of the ten was through the bush. A rough road had been cleared for traffic.

Our people went early in the season; I was to follow as soon as I could, which was more than a month later.

I expected the man to meet me at the station, but as I saw no one, I went on by myself. The season had been very hot, and everything seemed parched up. When I reached the road which ran through the bush I could not help thinking how easily it could be set on fire.

"Ugh!" I shuddered. "I hope that won't happen till I get out of this. I should be roasted."

But just then I spied the antedeluvian vehicle coming towards me about half a mile up, and I quickly dismissed from my mind all thoughts of fire.

Tess was driving the conveyance and she was alone. I was delighted with the prospect of a two hours' *tête-à-tête* with her, but thought it strange that old Joe had not come for me. Tess explained that the man was away on an errand, and she had come instead.

Then the thought of fire came to me again, and I could not help mentioning it to Tess. She laughed.

"No danger of that," she said, as she turned the horse's head back in the direction he had come. "You *are* nervous."

It was a delightful afternoon. The air was now cooling down and the ride along that road was very pleasant. We chatted and laughed until I quite forgot the existence of any such thing as fire or danger.

We had covered about a quarter of the length of that road when, on looking to the south, I suddenly noticed a dense black smoke rising in large, thick masses three or four miles off. It seemed to be rapidly approaching. Again that terrible thought of fire suggested itself.

"We had better get home as quickly as possible! That is the bush on fire!" said Tess suddenly. It was her turn to be nervous, judging by the tremour in her voice.

In a few minutes the whole situation had changed. The bush was on fire, and the flames were rushing towards us at an alarming rate.

Our octogenarian steed would not move any faster, and the road seemed to cross the track of the fire some distance ahead of us. Our situation was becoming serious. The road was not wide enough to afford us an oasis in this approaching simoon, and if the flames got within half a mile of us we could not escape, except by a miracle.

The fire came nearer. There was no mistaking it now. Vegetation of all kinds had become veritable tinder in the continued heat and drought, and before the destroying flames it disappeared as snow before the sun.

We could now distinctly hear the distant crack and roar of the flames. The twilight was coming swiftly on. We began to get thoroughly frightened as the fire came nearer and nearer.

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A great cloud of sparks and smoke, the advance guard of the all-devouring enemy, began to blow in our faces and fire the dry undergrowth near us. A breeze had sprung up and helped our all-destroying enemy.

I applied the whip vigorously to the old horse, and he seemed to put forth his best energies, but the ancient cart was so heavy that he did not get along any faster than a good trot.

The girl beside me was pale, but her lips were firmly set and her eyes shone with a lustrous, determined light. She would not flinch, I saw. She came of stern stuff, this tender young girl, and the fierce, stubborn spirit of her British ancestry was standing her now in good stead. I knew Tess would not faint or scream or do anything foolish or wild, but would be a comrade to me in our danger, with a courage equal, if not superior to my own.

On came the fire. It was now within half a mile of us and roaring like a wild beast in sight of his prey. A great cloud of smoke and sparks preceded the flames and blew right in our faces, making our eyes smart so that we could scarcely see, and griming and peppering our flesh till it felt raw.

I scarcely knew how I managed to see the many minor features in the play which afterwards came so near being a tragedy, but every little thing is indelibly impressed upon my mind, even to this hour.

Our old horse was now fully alive to the danger we were in. He trembled and shook in every limb, and drew the rickety old vehicle along at a rate it had never gone before.

I held the reins and spoke encouraging words to him, and tried to comfort the brave girl at my side.

Tess was trying to keep the sparks off us with a little silk parasol, one of my gifts to her, but soon there were so many holes burnt in that dainty relic of civilisation, that it became a veritable colander, through which poured a red-hot blinding flood.

A great, hissing, cracking cinder lighted on her Tam-o'-Shanter, and that soon was so near a blaze that I pitched it off and threw it away.

Tess looked like an angry goddess. Her longt brown hair had escaped from its fastenings and swept out behind in the wind our passage created.

As she held the reins while I warded off a blazing bough that came hurtling upon us, with her eyes sparkling with excitement, her face pale as ashes, and her lips set, she looked like another Queen Boadicea driving her chariot of wrath over the necks of her proud Roman insulters. Even in those moments of agony I wondered how she kept up so marvellously.

We were now about half way home and almost in the belt of flame. Things might now get better, and if we could hold out for another half hour there was a chance of our getting off with our lives. I tried to speak, but my throat was so parched that I could not utter a sound.

The heat was frightful. Clouds of dense white smoke settled about us in suffocating closeness, while the ever-increasing roar of the flames made a grand and awful diapason. And the fire came closer and closer—and finally, it reached us.

"Tess!" I shouted, as I put my arm about her waist and drew her down below the side of the rickety old vehicle. "Dear girl, our time has come! Good-bye!"

"Dear Ben, good-bye!" I read, rather than heard, from her lips.

It was impossible to hear her words.

And after that, as the novelists say, all was like a dream. I have a confused recollection of a heat so terrible as to almost force my eyes from their sockets and shrivel my skin up to parchment—of the old horse dropping to the ground—of standing over my brave Tess trying to fight off the flames—of agonising burns on my head, face and hands! And then there came a terrible roar, I seemed to see ten thousand stars, and all was darkness.

I never knew just how long I was unconscious, but it must have been for many hours, for when consciousness again mounted her throne in my soul it was broad day. At first I could not open my eyes at all. Then I managed to just separate the lids, but it was the acutest torment to do so. I afterwards found that they had been horribly burnt.

When at length I could see about me, what a desolate scene it was that met my blurred and crippled vision. As far as my poor sight could reach there was nothing but blackness, except overhead—a landscape in jet silhouetted sharply against the soft azure of the clear sky.

A few feet from me lay the figure of a human being! It was Tess!

And was she dead? Merciful Heaven! About half of her clothes were gone and she lay motionless, as though dead.

How I suffered at that sight no one but myself can ever know. But I could not move, and the hot tears of which I was not ashamed oozed from my eyes like drops of liquid fire and ploughed red-hot furrows down my scorched cheeks. And then I again lapsed into unconsciousness.

Whole ages might have passed before I knew anything more. Then suddenly I opened my eyes and saw I was in bed at home. By the bedside sat my small sister Jennie.

"You have been ill just three weeks, Ben," said she, "and 'Tessie'"—everyone of us said "Tessie" and not Miss Mills—"is just able to walk about."

It came out afterwards that Tess had received her worst burn while trying to ward off a blazing branch from my head after I had become unconscious. Of course, she was lionised for her bravery—"when I didn't do anything brave at all," she afterwards said to me, with a bright blush. I didn't say anything, and my action immediately following is scarcely worth recording.

Now, when I take my youngest boy on my knee and pour into his never-tiring ear, again and again, the story of my escape from a fiery death, and then look across the table where sits my sweet-faced wife, I shudder at the recollection of that night of horror, and marvel at the strength of a true woman's love.

Gerald Blake.

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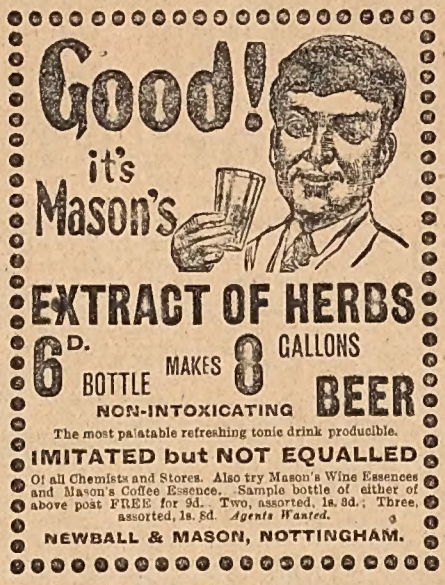
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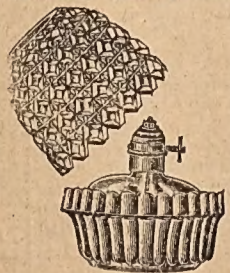

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PLAIN SPEAKING.

A Feminine Reader writes to ask whether we consider it safer to ride on the top or inside a 'bus———There is a widespread superstition that the safest place is inside, but this is quite a mistake. In the event of a collision or of the 'bus being overturned, you stand a much better chance of escaping uninjured if riding outside than you do when cooped up and hampered by a dozen frantic persons, all struggling to reach the door. On top, too, there is less chance of your being crushed by the weight of the overturning vehicle, and in any case your hands and face wouldn't be cut by broken glass.

A. H. D.—Yes, every volunteer recruit has first of all to pass a medical examination.

Native.—Although idolatry still exists in some parts of the Philippines, the natives are not so bad as you imagine. There is one pretty custom, at least, practised in the interior portions of the group. The peasants fill small bamboo baskets with fruit and food, and set them outside their dwellings; any passing traveller is welcome to take what he wants. He pays nothing if he be poor, but if he can afford to pay, he drops something into the receptacle placed near for that purpose. The custom is not abused, or it would have been discontinued; which speaks well for the people generally.

Bustard.—The great bustard was once an ordinary object of chase on Newmarket Heath, and was seen in large numbers in Wiltshire also. The bustard scarcely ever flies, but on foot it is very swift, and tested the capabilities of horses and dogs before it could be captured. Taken all in all, it is the largest of British birds.

T. L. asks for information on a cheerful subject; he wishes to know the favourite method of committing suicide.———Your morbid curiosity may be satisfied by some statistics compiled by Dr. Whitcombe, of Birmingham. His experience shows that shooting and hanging are favourite methods with men, but women prefer drowning. Quite a number of people put an end to their existence by drinking carbolic acid.

D. W. S.—The best clay pipes come from the Devonshire pits. The original colour is grey, which turns to white in the process of baking. From first to last, a good clay passes through about a dozen hands before it is ready for use.

J. S. W.—The expression "red letter day" originated in the old custom of printing the saints' days—which were considered lucky—on the calendar in red ink.

Cyclist asks: "Has the bicycle furthered trade outside the business created by its own manufacture?"———Certainly. Every great industry necessarily has a reflex action on others, so that other trades would benefit by the money spent on and in connection with cycling. But the bicycle is having an effect upon trade in this way: Riders are not slow to complain of the condition of roads and highways, and undoubtedly cause more money to be spent to keep them in better condition; and good roads facilitate transmission of goods, and so increase trade. In Siam the cycle is proving a real blessing; the nobility have taken it up enthusiastically, and are bringing about a complete change in the condition of the highways to the great increase of trade.

E. S.—The dome of St. Paul's Cathedral is about as many feet high as there are days in the year.

Benedict.—After the first five years fowls cease to be profitable so far as the laying of eggs is concerned. According to an authority, the birds average twenty eggs during the first year, 120 in the second, 135 in the third, and 115 in the fourth. After this the number decreases by twenty a year, and in the ninth year only ten are laid.

O. R. writes to ask in which part of London is land most valuable.———The land in Pall Mall and Piccadilly is valued at £500,000 an acre, and the very smallest shops in that vicinity can easily be let for £1,000 per year, while houses of any size that are situated anywhere near Hyde Park Corner, cannot be obtained for less than £3,000 a year. Land in the City, too, is exceedingly valuable. The ground on which the Mansion House stands is worth at least half a million, and the sites occupied by some of the big Lombard Street banks are of even greater value.

D. A.—The largest sundial in the world is Hayon Horoo, a large promontory rising to a height of 3,000 feet above the Ægean Sea. As the sun runs its course the shadow of the mountain touches, one by one, a circle of islands which act as hour-marks.

Despatch.—Reuter's first office for the transmission of telegrams was opened in Aix-la-Chapelle in 1849, but on the opening of the route from Calais to Dover in 1851, the office was transferred to London. Reuter then conceived the idea of supplying the papers with news, but the proposed arrangement was declined, although the principal morning newspapers were in the habit of running expresses at enormous cost. But at length some of them made a contract with him and the others were glad to follow their example.

K. T. puts this question: "Is it a fact that the tendency of the richer classes is to choose the western portion of a city for their abode—if so, why?"———The tendency is noticeable in almost every capital in Europe. The cause is difficult to ascertain, but one explanation seems reasonable. It is that the prevailing winds come from the west, south-west, and north-west, and blow the impurities of the air eastward; hence the air in the west is purer than in the east, and those who can afford to have the best of things have chosen the west. In time this has become a fashion, and the west is regarded as the rich quarter, and, therefore, the proper place for people with money. The question of purity of atmosphere has little or nothing to do with the selection now.

Red.—It is estimated that among English-speaking people one person in fifty has red hair.

Bobby writes to ask why "Scotland Yard" is so called.———Because on the site of the old building, a house was erected for the accommodation of King Kenneth III. of Scotland, when he came to England to pay homage to the King.

G. K. L.—"Keelhauling" was a form of punishment used in the navies of the last century. It consisted of tying long ropes round a man's head and heels and about each wrist, lowering him over the stem of the ship, and dragging him by means of the leg and wrist with ropes exactly along the keel from stem to stern. Only about one man in three survived this punishment.

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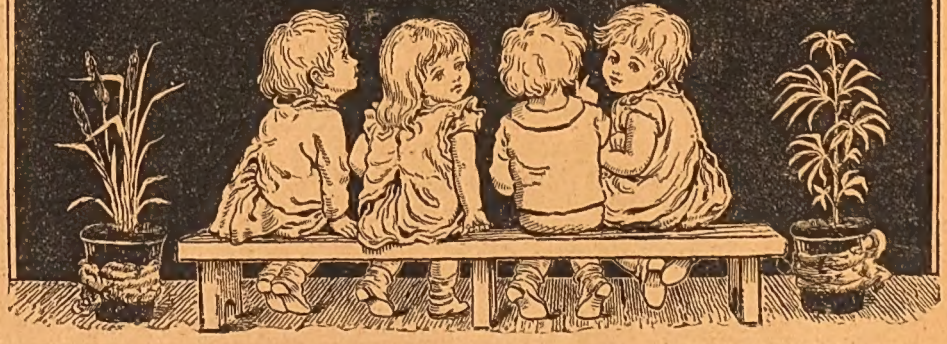

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